

Transition of the Ezhavas in Travancore: Interpreting T.K. Madhavan

**Thesis submitted to the University of Kerala
for the award of Degree of Philosophy**

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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis 'Transition of the Ezhavas in Travancore: Interpreting T.K. Madhavan', submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy to the University of Kerala, is a record of bona fide research carried out by Mr. M. Mydeen Khan, Lecturer (Sel:Gr.) in History, Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram, under my supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title and it represents an independent and original work of the candidate.

Karyavattom
03 December 2008

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Declaration

I hereby affirm that this doctoral thesis entitled 'Transition of the Ezhavas in Travancore: Interpreting T.K. Madhavan', submitted to the University of Kerala for the award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a original research work carried out under the supervision and guidance of Dr. S. Sharafudeen, Professor and Head, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Kerala, Karyavattom, Thiruvananthapuram. This thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition previously.

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PREFACE

The present study is an attempt to unravel some intricate problems related to the Sree Narayana Movement (SNM) in Travancore, pioneer and foremost among the renaissance initiatives in Kerala. Tremendous changes in my long cherished social and political views led to evolve a new perspective and the study is a direct result of such changes and transformations. The disintegration of Soviet Union in the beginning of 1990's has had far reaching consequence at various levels all over the world. As a result of this development it became imperative that one's beliefs and prioritization of subject of study needed reconsideration and re-evaluation. In India in the backdrop of anti-Mandal agitation, there occurred a rapid polarization among social forces which resulted in strengthening extreme nationalism or the so-called cultural nationalism. This also reiterated the need for a detailed enquiry into the renaissance movement in Kerala.

Since the beginning of the 1980's, as a student of history, I have been interested in subjects like nation and nationalism. I had the opportunity to be a post-graduate student in the Department of History, Kerala University and the specialization in modern period has been helpful in closely studying the Indian national movement. Moreover, the political developments at that time contributed much to develop my interest in the concept of nationhood and also in the Indian national movement which had made the nation possible.

My political views were so intense that I could not concentrate on a study of caste complexities at that time. It was also a time when the dictum that the caste question would in itself be solved when the class question was solved was being repeatedly invoked as a *mantra*. Therefore no attempt was made to study the history of renaissance movements, the immense role played by them in profoundly changing the social scenario and their interrelation with nation and nationalism. The shift to a new orientation more or less occurred when I

could familiarize with works of Prof. T.K. Ravindran, the well known historian, my teacher and the former Head of the Department History, Kerala University.

The idea of a research on the linkage between Kerala's renaissance movements and the national movement was first suggested by K. Venu. Later I discussed it in detail with my research guide, Prof. S. Sharafudeen before registering as a research scholar with Kerala University. It was he who mentioned the name of T.K. Madhavan (1885-1930), one of the early leaders of SNM. At a crucial moment in the process of community formation of the Ezhavas, T.K. Madhavan's intervention had sought to link the community with the national movement. Thus began this research about eight years ago.

It can be said that nowhere else in the subcontinent were the caste and its institutional systems so oppressive to the non- caste Hindus as in Kerala, particularly in Travancore. Caste regulations and practices had inexorably held sway over the minutest level of social life. There was no State anywhere else which considered the preservation of the caste system as its sacred duty. The SNM gave leadership to the activities to deconstruct this situation which was thought to be unassailable and immutable. It was found that the tools usually employed by current historiographies are inadequate to posit the changes effected through this process of deconstruction, viz., the modernization and democratization of Travancore. The study also envisages an attempt at an alternative enquiry to situate the modern history of Travancore. That forms the basic premise of this study.

The study progresses by interpreting the public activities of T.K. Madhavan spreading over one and half decades (1915-1930). The initiatives of Madhavan were a marked departure from the foundational ethos of the SNM, which problematized the concept of nation and nationality. But still he managed to enjoy the faith and confidence of Sree Narayana Guru, the ultimate rallying point of all hues of the Ezhava leadership and the community.

It was T.K. Madhavan who came forward with an attempt which was first of its kind to alleviate the sufferings of the Ezhavas. But consequent awakening of the community rather helped to strengthen the trends of religious conversion. It was also as a part of his attempts to overcome these challenges that Madhavan began his negotiation with the national movement. His activities and confrontations that ensued were landmarks in the community formation process of the Ezhavas.

The integration of the SNM with the national movement tended to deflect the path in which Kerala society was advancing. Because of this the direction of SNM, instrumental in the democratization and modernization of Kerala changed and it tellingly affected the future course of Kerala society also. The present study interrogates a major theoretical intervention of the 20th century on the emergence of the nation and argues that such theories are invalid in the context of the role of print in Travancore. The enquiry into the linkage between SNM and the national movement is the core of the study and it is that primarily differentiates it from the rest.

In this venture, I have been guided by Dr. S. Sharafudeen, Prof. and Head of the Department of Islamic Studies, University of Kerala, Karyavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram. I owe him a lot for his sustained interest and decisive interventions in my work. Working under his guidance, I have really experienced a great deal of academic pleasure.

I am particularly thankful to Dr. B. Sobhanan, Prof. and Head of the Department of History, University of Kerala for his intellectual help and valuable suggestions. He was so generous to provide me all assistance from the Department, i.e. my *alma mater* and the centre of research. Thanks are due to Prof. P. Vasumathy Devi, (Dept. of History, University of Kerala), my teacher. I record my deep gratitude for Dr. K.K. Kusuman who is not with us now, for encouraging me and suggesting valuable sources pertaining to my topic.

Helping to formulate my ideas and changing my perceptions, I oblige much to Dr. T.K. Ravindran.

This research thesis has taken shape over a long period and all along the way I have incurred many debts of gratitude.

I am indebted to Dr. Babu Vijayanath (son of T.K. Madhavan), for his unstinted encouragement by providing valuable primary source materials. Interviews with him on many times at various places were immensely resourceful and revealing as they helped to unearth many realities behind the issues taken by T.K. Madhavan including Vaikom Satyagraha. And also to Mr. G. Priyadarsanan, who provided unique help for this research, without which it could not have taken this shape. On many days I enjoyed his hospitality at his home. With the late Prof. Tirunelloor Karunakaran, the famous Malayalam litterateur, I used to discuss various aspects of my arguments and have benefited from his comments particularly on the issues of tussle between Kumaran Asan and T. K. Madhavan. I have received generous encouragement from him.

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Sadly and most unfortunately during the course of this research work I lost my intimate friend and intellectually engaging colleague, Prof. Salim Balakrishnan (Former Head, Department of History, University College, Thiruvananthapuram) in January, 2008. He was instrumental in profusely influencing me on ideas of caste question. He was a man of books and ideas.

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I consider myself fortunate in having had the opportunity to present some of my views in two major international seminars. One, *International Seminar on Kerala History*, 16-18 March, 2006, organized by Kerala Council for Historical Research. I record my thanks to Prof. K.N. Panikkar and Dr. P.J. Cherian for inviting me to this seminar. The other one is, *20th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies*, 7-11 July, 2008, organized by School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, University of Manchester, United Kingdom and my regards to Dr. K. Raviraman, who extended invitation to this conference. I am thankful to the participants of these two seminars who have made comments and raised questions and made me to rethink some of my assumptions.

I am grateful to my P.G. students at University College, Thiruvananthapuram, particularly to Biju Thomas and the late Mary Dasan for their active response to many of my ideas.

Nearly eight years of research work has taken me to various libraries and archives across the state and outside. I should also thank librarians, archivists and assistants for their patient help and these include Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala State Regional Archives, Kozhikode. Archives and Libraries of Newspapers and institutions: The Hindu, Chennai, Mathrubhoomi, Kozhikode, Malayala Manorama, Kottayam. Kerala University Library (Kerala

Research section), Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala Legislative Assembly Library, Thiruvananthapuram, Department of History Library, University of Kerala, Karyavattom, Libraries of International Centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Sahitya Akademy, Thrissur, Kumaran Asan National Institute of Culture, Thonakkal, Thiruvananthapuram and Appan Tampuran Memorial Museum and Library, Thrissur, Mahakavi Ulloor Memorial Library and Research Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, Sree Chitra Central Library, Thiruvananthapuram. I am also thankful to Mrs. Rajalekshmi for taking considerable pain to obtain some important documents from Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library, London.

I had also the opportunity of having access to the private collection of a number of scholars; however, they wish to remain anonymous. I record my sincere gratitude to all of them.

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Love to Safiya, my companion for a great deal of inspiration and support and to Tanveer Khan, my son for his patience and understanding.

ABBREVIATION

AICC	- All India Congress Committee
AUC	- Anti-Untouchability Committee
CMS	- Church Mission Society
CPI	- Communist Party of India
INC	- Indian National Congress
ISR	- Indian Social Reformer
KPCC	- Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee
KSA	- Kerala State Archives
LMS	- London Mission Society
Mal.	- Malayalam
ME	- Malayalam Era
NCM	- Non Co-operation Movement
Rpt.	- Reprint
SMPA	- Sree Moolam Popular Assembly
SNDP Yogam	- Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
SNM	- Sree Narayana Movement
TAR	- Travancore Administration Report
TCR	- Travancore Census Report
TINA	- There Is No other Alternative
TLC	- Travancore Legislative Council
TNA	- Tamil Nadu Archives
TPC	- Travancore Penal Code

INTRODUCTION

To map a decisive historical context, instrumental in transforming Kerala into a modern democratic society is not an easy undertaking. Our effort becomes more complex and difficult as the struggles for democratizing and modernizing the Kerala society were carried out in distinctly different ways. Sree Narayana Movement (SNM)), which spearheaded the struggles encompassed divergent and conflicting views but still managed to rally the masses behind it in a tremendously successful manner. Though the SNM was primarily concentrated in Travancore, the erstwhile princely state, it spread its activities to Cochin and Malabar too. Thus the movement which had spread its influence all over the state had a significant role in shaping modern Kerala.

This study progresses by re-reading and re-analysing the public activities of T.K. Madhavan (1885-1930), one of the most prominent leaders of *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana* (SNDP) *Yogam* in Travancore, who exceptionally enjoyed the faith and confidence of Narayana Guru, Gandhiji, Nationalists and caste Hindus, a privilege no other leader could enjoy. His engagement within the movement during 1915-1930 is considered as very crucial regarding Ezhava community as well as SNDP Yogam, since he inaugurated new methods and strategies to negotiate with caste, religion and nationalism. The period 1915-30 brought a new discourse within the SNM, at times subversively deviated from its foundational spheres. Nation and nationality became the primary concerns to be engaged by the movement and these became decisive categories in structuring community's psyche and its identity. This situation further brought new demands and new modes of community assertion, resulted in enormous ruptures and alternative enquiries within the movement.

The modern history of Travancore is the history of caste assertions and the transformation of castes with their intra divisions into a single community.

Every community based on its respective caste, asserted and established its identity and captured its rights in the social sphere. This process of community formation – righting the social wrongs - considered as a trajectory to the socio-political-cultural situation prevailed unhindered for a long time. But this deviation also underwent changes when the movement started negotiation with nation and nationality, the very concepts which were called into question and kept at a distance by the community. SNM unlike other contemporary social movements accommodated divergent views and opinions. One can witness an array of leaders keeping diametrically opposite views within the movement – a testimony to its strength and democratic character. This elasticity facilitated umpteen possibilities and so many challenges as well.

No other community has experienced such a flux as the Ezhavas during this time. Ezhava community was eager to explore the enormous possibilities that lay ahead of them; a section within the community seriously questioned the logic of it continuing as a part of Hindu religion. Deserting the Hindu religion was an option opened by the emerging realities on the ground. Though Ezhavas had previous experiences of attempting religious conversions, the move at this particular juncture generated serious differences on the question within the community. The most influential section within the SNM sought to find new strategies to deal with the crisis. They started negotiations with the national movement, tried to instill a sense of national feeling and made attempts to incorporate the Ezhava community into a pan Indian movement. As T.K. Madhavan was instrumental in forging this crucial alliance between Ezhava community and the national political movement, his activities form the central part of study.

This crucial integration process concreted during the period in which demand for temple entry of Ezhavas gathered its momentum (1917 – 1924). So naturally this study attempts to investigate the issues related to the demands for temple entry, its manifold implications and consequences in detail. The

problems involved in the process of integration between the Ezhava community represented by the SNM and the national movement will be the main focus of the study.

The transformation of Kerala to a modern democratic society was achieved to a considerable extent by different communities, elevated from the status of victims to self determinant authors of their own destinies. Each caste group achieved this through riots and incessant conflicts between them. The transformation of these castes from the state of oppression, exploitation and marginalization for long centuries due to their subservient position in the caste hierarchy, to the status of 'subject agents', capable of bringing deep changes in the society was phenomenal. In the social sphere of Kerala so many 'subject agents' emerged during the last decades of 19th and the early decades of 20th century and the Ezhava community was the most prominent among them by virtue of their socio-economic position and numerical strength compared to other oppressed castes.

By the turn of 20th century, particularly during 1905 – 1915, the nationalist movement was visibly under the control of extreme nationalist leadership, anchored in the sphere of Hindu values which devised strategies and action plans accordingly. An intense process of 'othering' was meticulously carried out during the period. Pan Hindu religious sentiments and complexes were manufactured and they became the central component of the movement. These became explicit in the 'Swadeshi – Boycott' movement in the wake of partition of Bengal. Anti-Muslim campaign was unleashed when the Minto-Morley constitutional reforms were announced and the nationalist movement was able to garner popular base through this campaign. Political programme of the nationalist movement was based on intense Hindu revivalist agenda and these tendencies were branded as nationalist aspirations. Indian National Congress was liberated from the status of a body, merely conducting '*Annual Tamasha*' during the last week of every December, to a real 'mass organisation'

representing the true nationalist spirit. Indian nation was pre-supposed as representing the collective will of an imagined united Hindu population and Hinduism lay at the core of an emergent Indian national identity. The nationalist discourse was thus able to cultivate a feeling of being 'Hindu' and this sense could automatically be transformed into a sense of being Indian. Since this category of Meta Indian Hindu concept transcended all differences based on caste, language and region easily functioned as the solid base of a pan Indian nation.

While the popular base of this Hindu nationalism spread elsewhere in India, this period witnessed the spring season of community formation in Kerala. During the period the nationalist movement could not make any impact here and there was no wide spread national feeling among the people of Kerala, particularly in Travancore. The period saw incessant riots and conflicts among different castes to capture their own rights and position in the society relentlessly.

The Kerala society advanced in these lines, positively 'beyond the nationalist frames' (to the usage we owe to Sumit Sarkar) cannot be appropriated by employing the interpretive tools of dominant historiographies or those critiqued it. This lacuna has to be explained a little, a pre-condition to posit the transformation of Kerala society. Most schools of the dominant historiographies turn around the hinges of nationalism vs. colonialism binary – as if *there is no alternative* (TINA). Those schools emerged as critiques to this *TINA*, proposed alternative paradigms only to place the subaltern people who were denied their due position in the making of nation and nationality and were thought to be mobilized from 'above'. But how can we appropriate with these tools the sections for those whom the project of nation and nationality were never important concerns? Such tools are inadequate in problematizing the issues in question.

Constrictions of Available Historiographies

The transition of Travancore into a modern society cannot be appropriated by the tools of available historiographies. Travancore, the model state or *Dharma Rajya* unlike many other princely states of that time, solidly erected on the canons of caste system, proclaimed loudly that the duty (*Dharma*) of the state was to preserve, protect, maintain and uphold the values of varna and caste system. The oppressed non-caste Hindus, who constituted majority of the population naturally, became the victims of the state. Colonial inroads into state's administration and the relentless activities of Christian missionaries, who enjoyed colonial patronage, brought radical changes in the social sphere of Travancore. First signs of social change appeared towards the first half of 19th century in the form of a series of violent revolts of *Shanars* of South Travancore against caste oppression.¹

The development and change consequent to these revolts (one of the most discussed areas in the history of Travancore on which a flood of literature is available) crystallized future subaltern movements. Conscious interventions of renaissance movement and larger impacts of colonial modernity, equipped the oppressed castes to confront the state or to confront the upper castes. This process continued in the form of incessant conflicts between the oppressed and privileged castes. The former asserted their rights and significantly contributed in the transformation of Travancore into a modern democratic state. In this regard our concern in the introductory section is whether the apparatus of

¹ M.S.S.Pandian, 'Colonialisavum Deseeyathayum Thekken Thiruvithamkoorile Vaikuntaswamy Prasthanathekkurichu' (Colonialism and Nationalism: On Vaikunta Swamy Movement in South Travancore), *Kerala Padanangal I* (Mal.), Quarterly, April-June 1993, pp. 26-47.

Shanars of Travancore are presently called *Nadars*. In the 19th century majority of them were impoverished. They were called *Shanars* and very few rich among them were known as *Nadars*. *Shanars* gained social mobility and economic progress during the last decades of the 19th and early 20th century and assumed the common caste name as *Nadars*. In this study M.S.S. Pandian analyzes the Vaikunta Swamy Movement by contextualizing the structural limitations of dominant historiographies, anchored in the colonialism and nationalism binary.

dominant historiographies in general, Marxist and Subaltern in particular are capable enough to appropriate this transition of the region in question.

Periodization of history, dividing it as ancient, medieval and modern always remained a question of controversy among the practitioners of history. When did the modern period begin in Indian History? What should be the parameter in deciding it? Traditionalists favoured that, rise or fall of empires / kingdoms should be taken into consideration for the division. According to this perception the year 1757 – Battle of Plassey – is the beginning of the modern period in Indian History, since the battle marked the beginning of Mughal disintegration and English domination. After a prolonged debate it was progressively settled that, the changes occurred in the social structure should be the criterion of the periodization. It was the Marxist historiography that gave stress on the changes in the social structure, since it placed people at the centre. There is no disagreement in this regard as the people are the real motivating force behind history. By placing the 1857 revolt as the beginning of modern period in Indian History, Marxist historiography endorsed the view that modern period of Indian History began with anti – British struggle. In short the history of national movement / anti-British struggle has become synonymous with the history of modern India. The question had been settled; inauguration of the modern period began with anti-British struggle and the social changes were brought out by the struggles led by the national movement. If people are really mattered then the connotation attributed to social change would have been different.

A general examination of the nature of available historiographies, either dominant or alternative is attempted here by looking into their selected works. This examination is neither exhaustive nor deep.

The first generation imperialist historians, right from James Mill (1773-1836) *The History of British India* (1817) to administrator historians like

William Wilson Hunter, John William Kaye, G.B. Melleson, T.R. Holmes, Alfred Lyal, John Strachey and Talbois Wheeler, through their writings in the last quarter of 19th century laid the initial but clear foundations of imperialist historiography. Though they differ in niceties they termed Britain and its colony, India had a patron – client relation and they propagated the idea that Britain had every right to rule India due to ‘obvious reasons’. By the end of 19th century imperialist historiography turned its attention towards the nature of anti – British struggle and the national movement. Their writings vividly described nation, nationalism, national people, colonialism, British rule and the anti – colonial content of the nationalist struggle. In their writings colonialism and nationalism were the central subjects of discussion. In this regard a notable work, *Indian Unrest* by Valentine Chirol published in London in 1910, was much discussed. The imperialist interpretation centrally footed in nationalist movement and took its definite shape in the 1920’s. The imperialist interpretation of the national movement began with the official declaration of Viceroys like Dufferin (1884 - 1888), Curzon (1889-1905) and John Morley, the then Secretary of State for India. As the part of imperialist perspective on modern India and nationalist movement, Cambridge history of India series appeared. In its 5th and 6th volumes edited by H.H. Dodwell, published by Cambridge University Press appeared respectively in 1929 and 1932 clearly envisaged this perspective. The basic contention of imperialist historiography was that there was no contradiction between the interest of Indian people and British colonialism. The binary they opted to explain the modern Indian history was nationalism versus colonialism and at the same time they offered some vibrant criticism towards the national movement. Some of them viewed that the nationalist movement was a result of criminal conspiracy of elite Hindus and the movement represented only a microscopic minority of the larger Hindu population. The political content of the movement was limited as the motive behind it was nothing but to re-establish the hegemony of this minority in the changed circumstances, due to British domination. Some of the imperialist

historians were of the view that it was deceptive to call the movement national as it represented only a minority.

From 1940's a liberal version of imperialist interpretation appeared through the writings of P.E. Roberts, *History of British India*, (revised edition 1938) and Reginald Coupland- *Indian Politics 1936-48* (1943). It was further elaborated by Percival Spear – *A History of India* (1965). The liberal views endorsed that the nationalist movement really represented the Indian masses but that was not borne out of colonial exploitation but by the virtue of colonial education, which instilled a sense of nationality among the Indians.

Finally a neo-imperialist approach based on the political changes in modern India came out. The most important work considered as seminal was done by Anil Seal.² There was a combined work by John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal³ and it was further elaborated by C.J. Baker, David Washbrook and C.A. Bayly.⁴ For them the mode of production and class theories did not matter in the study of history. They argue that the effort should concentrate on the sources which throw lights on the private lives of elites of that time. According to them no fundamental change occurred in the economic set up of India during the British rule. Modern categories like class and national masses were not valid as caste, religion and village societies formed the basic political structure of modern India. The nationalist politics emerged not to protect the interests of Indian people but to secure the interests of elites, which paved the way for formation of national political movement. The elites emerged

² Anil Seal, 1968. *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

³ John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson & Anil Seal, 1968. *Locality, Province and Nation, Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁴ (a) C.J. Baker & David Washbrook, (eds.), 1975. *South India: Political Institutions and Political Changes 1880-1947*, Delhi, Macmillan.

(b) David Washbrook, 1977. *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: Madras Presidency 1870-1920*, New Delhi, Vikas.

(c) C.A. Bayly, 1975. *Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad 1880-1920*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

not out of the changes occurred in the economic sphere but due to the institutional changes caused by the British administration mainly in the fields of education, legislative laws and adult franchise etc. The first generation English educated elites, constituted the early leadership of Indian National Congress. They consistently stood for manufacturing a pseudo nationalist feeling by creating the 'Other'. This is a pre-condition for imagining a nation and instilling a sense of nationality especially in the context of Indian reality. According to the neo-imperialist school the formation of Indian National Congress was the result and manifestation of the communal anxiety of these elites.

Nationalist historiography emerged as a counter to imperialist historiographies. Nationalist historiography received its ideology and strength from the nationalist movement. Though there were different strands among them, all of them were united in opposing the British hegemony. Though some among them concede that the Raj with its modernity had positive aspects they had no disagreement with others in opposing the economic exploitation of the British rule. The nationalist historiography became prominent in the post independence period.

Dadabhai Naorji's '*Poverty and Un British Rule in India*' (1901)⁵ can be considered as the beginning of Nationalist historiography. It established with statistical data that the economic deprivation was due to colonial exploitation and he developed the '*Drain Theory*'. Himself a strong admirer of British parliamentary system and its institutions, he appealed for more sympathetic attitude towards India. He declared that the real content of the British rule ran against its declared policy, which opposed the merciless exploitation.

⁵ Dadabhai Naorji, 1901, Rpt. (1990). *Poverty and Un British Rule in India*, Delhi, Low Price Publications, *Passim*.

Romesh Chandra Dutt, the civil servant turned moderate nationalist deserves special mention. His work, *Economic History of India* in two volumes underscores the reasons of economic deprivation and the poverty of India under British rule. But the salient feature of nationalist historiography was its placing of nation and nationality at its centre. The Nationalist historiography in the pre 1947 period was mainly by the works of political leaders like Lalalajpath Rai, Surendranath Banerjee, P.G. Pradhan, Subash Chandra Bose, Patabhi Sitaramayya, C.F. Andrews and Girija Mukherjee. This emerged in its full bloom after 1947 through the writings of R.C. Majumdar (*History of Freedom Movement in India- 3 Vols. 1962-63*), Tarachand (*History of Freedom Movement in India- 4 Vols. 1961-72*) and Visweshar Prasad (*Changing Roles of Indian National Movement, 1966*). The general approach of these writings can be safely surmised that colonialism should be wiped out at any cost as it was the perennial source of the political enslavement and so detrimental to the right of self determination of the people of India. Lajpatrai, R.G. Pradhan, Subash Chandra Bose, Visweshar Prasad and others tracked the antiquity of Indian nation from time immemorial. Some among the nationalist historians did not share this view. Bipan Chandra advanced a theory that the modern Indian nation emerged through anti-British struggle. Nationalist movement was the process of 'nation-in-making'.⁶

Though the Marxist historiography and the Nationalist historiography differed in niceties, they shared common perceptions and used the same paradigms. Both agreed that the binary of modern Indian history was nationalism and colonialism. The basic disagreement of Marxists with nationalist was that the nationalist historiographers failed to see the anti-imperialist content of nationalist aspirations and also to analyze the differences of the people in line of class; class consciousness, class character and class contradiction of different sections. They adopted classical tools of Marxism to

⁶ Bipan Chandra, *et. al*, 1989. *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, pp. 13-30.

analyze and interpret the societies, mainly on class lines. This was a colossal failure to locate the Indian societies; their dynamics was clearly determined not on economic disparities but on social disparities based on caste.

Marxists perception was 'clear', they equated the oppressed masses of India to the working class of Europe, thus failed to distinguish the difference in contexts. Economic liberation/ mobility do not necessarily bring changes in the social status of oppressed castes. Kerala society even in the first decades of 20th century was a telling example. The case of *Alumoottil Channar*, who belonged to one of the wealthiest families in Travancore bears testimony to it. Being an Ezhava he was forbidden to travel in his car (during that time the only other person who owned a car in Travancore was the king of the state) through the public road which was running in front of a Hindu temple.⁷ The incidents narrated by *Changaramkumarath Krishnan* (C. Krishnan) also from the wealthiest Ezhava family in Malabar show that things were not very different in there too. He regularly received punishment from his teacher for reaching late in the school, as he had to observe distance pollution many a time on his way.⁸

Beginnings of Marxist historiography were witnessed in the writings of M.N. Roy. His *India in Transition* (1922) is a classical example. Another significant intervention was from Rajani Palme Dutt, whose *India Today* (1947) is considered as a serious analysis of colonial economy. Dutt categorized colonial economy into three successive stages perhaps based on the writings of Karl Marx on India in *New York Daily Tribune*. According to Dutt the period 1757-1813 was the mercantilist phase of East India Company and the subsequent policy change of English government towards the East India Company was seen as the impact of Industrial Revolution in English politics and society. English parliament passed many legislations curtailing the

⁷ C. Kesavan, 1999. *Jeevitha Samaram* ('Life Struggle'-Autobiography), Trivandrum, Prabhat Book House, p. 225.

⁸ K.R. Achutan, 1971. *C. Krishnan*, Biography (Mal.), Kottayam, Sahitya Pravathaka Sahakarana Sangham, pp. 331-34.

monopolistic rights of East India Company and giving more freedom to the industrial capitalist class to trade with India under the pressure of industrial capitalists. Dutt considered the second phase 1813-1858 as the classical age of free trade and industrial capitalists' exploitation. K. Marx vividly described how Lancashire and Manchester became the world capitals of textile industry by pushing the Indian cotton industries aside. He observed 'India the great workshop of cotton manufacture of the world since time immemorial became now inundated with English twists and cotton stuffs'.⁹ The last phase from 1858, witnessed the beginning of finance-imperialism through a massive chain of British controlled banks, export-import firms and managing agency houses.

In the post independence period majority of the works on modern Indian history belonged to various Marxist schools. A.R. Desai who made important contributions in this direction observed that a new national mass had emerged due to common economic system evolved under British rule and he analysed the versatile changes occurred in Indian society. Marxist interpretation gathered momentum particularly after 1960s; among them were orthodox and liberal Marxists. Bipan Chandra, S. Gopal, Barun De, Sunil Sen, Sumit Sarkar, Amalendu Guha, Tapan Rai Chaudari, and Soviet historians like Pavlov, Lavokovsky, Deokov and Balabushevic were the prominent among Marxists historians. The work by Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, eulogized the national movement. He observed that the Indian national movement was perhaps one of the best examples of the creation of an extremely wide movement with a common aim in which diverse political and ideological currents co-existed simultaneously and continued to contend for overall ideological and political hegemony over it. While intense debate on all basic issues were allowed, the diversity and tension did not welcome the cohesion and striking power of the movement; on the contrary, this diversity

⁹ Karl Marx, 'The East India Company, its History and Results', *New York Daily Tribune*, Issue No. 3816, 11 July 1853 in K. Marx & F. Engels, 1975. *The First War of Indian Independence 1857-59*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, p. 26.

and atmosphere of freedom and debate become a major source of its strength.¹⁰ Eulogies and tendencies of deifying the national movement are galore throughout the introduction which seems the terrain of the whole book.

Though authors of Marxist interpretation of Indian history since 1960 criticized the first generation Marxist writers as conventionalists, historians like Sumit Sarkar, who was closely associated with subaltern studies project and later offered serious criticism towards it, earlier held the view that conventional Marxist methodology was more appropriate to analyze the larger and sustained social conditions. Bipan Chandra and others did not hide their apprehension about certain tendencies of Marxist historiography ‘...however many of them and Palme Dutt in particular are not able to fully integrate their treatment of the primary anti-imperialist contradiction and the secondary inner contradiction, and tend to counter pose the anti-imperialist struggle to the class or social struggle.’ Bipan Chandra here makes point blank attack on Marxist school saying that it failed to properly evaluate the character of the movement; he adds that many of the Marxist writers also do not do an actual detailed historical investigation of the strategy, programme, ideology, extent and forms of mass mobilization, and strategic and tactical maneuvers of the national movement.¹¹ Irfan Habib considers this posture as unfortunate as it belittles the achievements of the left during the national movement and its contribution to it and he quickly urges that ‘we should treat the national movement (which was always larger than congress) as a common heritage’.¹²

An overview of the dominant historiographies (Imperialist – Nationalist and Marxist) has been attempted here precisely because the core issue involved in this study is inextricably linked with nationalism and national movement.

¹⁰ Bipan Chandra, *op.cit.*, p.14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹² Irfan Habib, 1997. ‘Problems of Marxist Historiography’ in *Essays in Indian History. Towards a Marxist Perception*, Chennai, Tulika, p. 10.

Before taking stock of the dominant historiographies and the one emerged as a critique to it, let us have a look at the scenario of Kerala. This examination is also a primer and inconclusive. They are mentioned here to make a point that these studies, either community oriented or more general social history of a particular period, are not quite adequate to address the complexities of the conflicts and the tensions that had been crucial in establishing communal identities and rights. Moreover the approaches of these works were generally confined within the framework of existing historiographic methodologies.

Social history writings took off here by the colonial bureaucrats and District Collectors to facilitate the colonial machine to chalk out administrative policies and programs. Like census its original aim was to have detailed information regarding the life and activities of people of different regions. Micro level data were collected in order to streamline the administration. The detailed description of each caste and community was obtained in this regard to satisfy the requirement of the state which being primarily a disciplining agent.

Despite all these intentions of the state, Logan's classic, *Malabar* (1887) rated as the most comprehensive and scholarly account of the life of Malabar till 1880's was and far more than a manual. British administrators encouraged rulers of Cochin and Travancore to have similar manuals – the result was P.Sankunny Menon's *A History of Travancore from Early Times* (1878), which gave emphasis on ancient history and never problematized society or its rulers. Later comes, V. Nagam Aiya's *Travancore State Manual 3 Vols.* (1906), T.K. Velupillai's *Travancore State Manual 4 Vols.* (1940) and C. Achutamenon's *Cochin State Manual* (1911), all on the lines of William Logan but not as meticulous or fine as his work. K.P. Padmanabha Menon's *Kochi Rajyacharithram* which deviated from the dynastic history paradigm is rated as a valuable account of the people and territory of Cochin.

Under Madras District Gazetteers programme, Malabar Gazetteer was published in 1908. It was a lucid survey of many things already discussed by Logan. In the post independence period the government of Kerala organised gazetteers departments and evolved programmes to write gazetteers of each district. A. Sreedhara Menon headed the department and published gazetteers of various districts. Gazetteers offered facts as such for the public, served good purpose of a reference book, useful to students of history.

L.A. Krishna Iyer's *Social History of Kerala* in 2 Vols published in 1968 discussed the culture and life of the pre-Dravidians and the Dravidian aborigines in the up-lands, the caste and communities in the plains. Anthropological studies by A. Aiyyappan, Kathleen Gough and John P. Mencher deserves special attention.

Path breaking efforts have been done by E.M.S. Namboodiripad in classical Marxist perspective. Nationality question was regarded as an important issue in Communist Party in the early 1940's and in this context E.M.S wrote *Onmekaal Kodi Malayalikal* (One and Quarter Crores of Malayalis) in 1946. In the same year the General Secretary of Communist Party of India, (C.P.I) P.C. Joshi submitted a memorandum to the British Cabinet Mission asking the British government to award the right of self determination for the different nationalities in India, which included Keralam. Memorandum demanded that right must be given to the nationalities to decide freely and choose options of joining the existing Indian Union, forming a separate sovereign state or becoming a part of another India Union. Origin of this idea was in the important resolution on *Revolution & National Unity* adopted in the first Party Congress of CPI (1943 Bombay) and the accompanying report on the same question moved by G. Adhikari. Though this resolution and allied documents following the correct Leninist position of self determination, it outlined India as a land of various nationalities having the right to form sovereign states, it curiously talked about Indian unity also. 'On the one hand these documents recognize that the

anti – British struggle created the ground for the development of national aspirations of different nationalities, on the other, they preserve the development of Indian national unity through the anti – British struggle. It is quite conceivable on the basis of the former evolution, that Indian unity that emerged through anti – British struggle is the unity of different nations, not a single national unity. But such a unity was projected as the unity of a single nation'.¹³

Similar to *Onnekal Kodi Malayalikal*, C.P.I leaders Bhavani Sen and P. Sundarayya wrote *Nootan Bangla* (New Bengal) and *Vishal Andhra* (Larger Andhra) respectively during this period. E.M.S further elaborated it and wrote *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi* (Kerala the Motherland of Malayalis) in 1947-48 and *Nationality Question in Kerala* (1952).¹⁴ E.M.S himself said that *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi* was the first attempt to examine Kerala history in Marxist perception.¹⁵ In the previous work (1946) he examined the history of Kerala from the feudal period to the period just before independence for which he used the epithet *Jati – Jenmi – Naduvazi Medavittam* (the hegemony of caste, landlord and local chieftains). He himself found some defects in his work (1946) as it did not clearly spell out the social condition prior to the feudal and local chieftdom period. He made an overview of some of the works already published in this area and particularly mentioned *The History of Kerala* (II Vols.) by Kerala History Association. He observed that these volumes had not shown the single minded concentration required for a history work. Instead of writing a total history, the book divided history in to various sections like social, economic, cultural and religious parts. E.M.S took

¹³ K. Venu, 'Introduction' in T.G. Jacob (ed.), 1988. *National Question in India, Communist Party of India Documents 1942 – 47*, New Delhi, Odyssey Press, p.5.

¹⁴ E.M.S. Namboodiripad.

a) 1946. *Onnekal Kodi Malayalikal* (Mal), Calicut, Desabhimani press.

b) 1947-48.Rpt. (1965). *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi* (Mal), Trichur, Desabhimani Publications.

c) 1952. *Nationality Question in Kerala*, Bombay, Peoples Publishing House.

¹⁵ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, 1990. *Kerala Charitram Marxist Veekshanathil* (Mal), Trivandrum, Chintha Publishers, p.7.

exception to the author's dependence on myths and legends in the section of social history particularly in relation to caste and observed that such kind of presentation was backward looking. E.M.S regarded Sreedhara Menon's *Survey of Kerala History* (1967) as a work without these defects but found fault with it for not having a Marxist perspective.

Hegemony of caste, landlord and local chieftains; i.e. social, economic and political oppression as far as common people were concerned, was analyzed in pure Marxist paradigms and in tune with Communist Party's effort to liberate the oppressed classes from this hegemony and translate Keralam into a secular democratic state. Following the lines of E.M.S numerous Marxist historians attempted to reconstruct the social history of Kerala in which almost all of them subscribed to the idea that the caste and related oppression would vanish once the class question was solved. It is not possible to present all the works here due to various constraints, but specific deviation in this regard will be discussed in the later part of this introduction.

After a primary examination of dominant historiographies (Imperialist – Nationalist – Marxist) it appears that the tools employed by them are not appropriate to map the transition of Kerala to a modern society. The process of transformation was founded on entirely different and distinct footing. This was largely related to the process of community making of different castes and that through incessant conflicts among them. Caste played the most decisive role in shaping the society.

'*Vivekodayam*', the official organ of SNDP Yogam, popularly called as the 'Gazette of Ezhavas' (epithet is Dr. P. Palpu's) unequivocally declared that 'Oh! Riot you are the real reformer' it said that riots between castes lessened the

intensity of caste ostracism.¹⁶ Community making underwent divergent methods. There was a process of interrogating or abandoning Hindu religion by the oppressed castes, as it had been seen as the source of all oppressions. At times the caste assertions themselves turned into a process of securing positions within the religion. The subaltern caste groups particularly the Ezhava community consciously distanced themselves from the anti – British struggle and at times vehemently opposed the struggle led by the Nationalists. Yet there were times they negotiated with the national movement and tried to make it favourable for their community. This led to a direct integration with the national movement and brought about far reaching consequences. Such complexities were involved in the process of the formation of modern Kerala society.

In the case of Ezhavas the presence of all these complexities make it not easy to unravel the process of community formation. The resonant trends establishing themselves within Hindu religion and staking claim outside religion can be found. For these tendencies they had to address not only religion but also nationality. These all happened during the heydays of agitations for social equality. This became most evident at the time of the demand for temple entry of Ezhavas. This area constitutes the core part of this inquiry.

¹⁶ *Vivekodayam*, October – November 1915 (*Thulam 1091 M.E.*), Book No. 12, Issue No.7, p.9. (*Vivekodayam*, the official mouth piece of *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana* (SNDP) *Yogam*, was a bi-monthly for the first one year and since then it became a monthly. In the first six issues, it declared in the front page. '*Aruvippuram Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam Vakayaya Oru Dwimasantha Pustakam*' (A bi-monthly book owned by Aruvippuram SNDP Yogam), published from Trivandrum since 1904. First issue came out on 31 *Medam 1079 M.E* (1904 April-May). N. Kumaran Asan (1873-1924) the famous Malayalam litterateur and the first General Secretary of SNDP Yogam edited the journal till 1919, the year in which he relinquished SNDP Yogam General Secretary post. Curiously in the first and third issues the name of the editor was given as M. Govindan B.A, B.L, the Ezhava elite leader associated with SNDP Yogam since its inception in 1903. It was a well known fact that Kumaran Asan edited the journal. The name of M. Govindan in I & III issues might have been given due to some technical reasons.)

'The name *Vivekodayam* shows' M.K. Sanoo says, 'Kumaran Asan's reverence towards Swami Vivekananda. Kumarn Asan was very particular to include the sermons or percepts of Vivekananda regularly in *Vivekodayam* and the monthly was always under the influence of a Vivekananada halo'.

See, M.K. Sanoo, 1996. *Kumaran Asan* (Mal) Malayalam Men of Letters series, Dept: of Publications, Trivandrum, University of Kerala, p.38.

There were controversies and differences over these tendencies among the Ezhava leadership and there were also acute contradiction within each section. For instance N. Kumaran Asan and T.K. Madhavan held the same views on religion and both were against conversion, but stood diametrically opposite in matters of anti – colonial struggle led by the India National Congress and also in matters of nation and nationalism. Again Kumaran Asan and C. Krishnan endorsed the benevolence of the Raj and opposed political independence before attaining social liberation but differed on matters of religion and on the question of conversion. As a result of this conflict Kumaran Asan wrote the much famous *Mataparivartana Rasavadam* (The Alchemy of Religions Conversion)¹⁷ Sahodaran K. Ayyappan was a strong critic of T.K. Madhavan on many issues including temple entry demand. In one scathing attack he observed that the speeches and writings of the protagonists of temple entry demand thwarted the otherwise potential moves of Ezhavas for achieving self respect.¹⁸ At the same time it is significant to note that none of these differences undermined the process of community making of Ezhavas since the movement had an elastic rallying point in Sree Narayana Guru, (1856 – 1928) who strategically accommodated all the differences. These controversies surfaced with its ups and downs through out the movement. But these differences played their distinctive roles in community making. The different ways through which the Ezhava community attained consciousness itself shows

¹⁷ The Alchemy of Religious Conversion: While delivering the Presidential address in the 20th annual session of SNDP Yogam at Quilon, 12-13 May 1923, N. Kumaran Asan made a guarded criticism against C. Krishnan (see f.n.32) and Buddhism. C. Krishnan wrote a reply to this in *Mitavadi*, 28 May 1923, to which Kumaran Asan sent a lengthy rejoinder to *Mitavadi* vide his letter dated 15 June 1923, only to be returned. This article after a gap of more than ten years was published with an introduction of Moorkoth Kumaran on 30 July 1933. The Publisher was none other than M/s Sarada Book Depot, Thonakkal, Trivandrum owned by Mrs. Kumaran Asan, printed at Empire Press, Trivandrum. It was Moorkothu Kumaran who gave the title *Mataparivartana Rasavadam* (The Alchemy of Religious Conversion). Second edition was also published by M/s Sarada Book Depot in 1948, printed at Sreerama Vilasom Press, Quilon.

¹⁸ K. Ayyappan, 'Theendal Pinakkangal' (Pollution Clashes), *Sahodaran*, 1921 March – April (1096 Meenam M.E), Book No.3, Issue No. II, pp. 402 – 4.

the multiple possibilities, a sober way of community making and an unconventional method of community re-making.

These differences within the Ezhava community did not occur all at once, but were present through out the long process in which the Ezhavas were trying to assert themselves as a community. But during the period of temple entry claim, an extreme deviation surfaced with numerous complexities aiming at solving the disabilities of the community by closely allying with Hindu religion. This naturally facilitated to change the course of negotiations with Hinduism but also enabled the community to directly address the national movement, representing the process of nation - in - making which resulted in far reaching consequences. The renaissance movement advancing with an agenda, totally different from the modes of nationalist movement, got assimilated with it and the Kerala society tended to deflect from the path through which it was developing.

As had been pointed out in the beginning the available historiographies are too constricted to evaluate the tensions, traumas and complexities, which had been significant in shaping the modern Kerala society.

Constrictions: Self conscious or Super imposed

The attempt here to examine dominant historiographies or those emerged in opposition to them is not something new and there is no claim as such, but it is posited here as they are not the properly adequate tools to map the transitional change of modern Kerala society. In the case of Marxist historiography, currently vogue in the domain, a little more examination is required. The basic analytical method of dominant historiographies on modern Indian history is based on the question of conflict between nationalism and colonialism. Nationalist and Marxist schools took it as binary opposites.

The neo – shades of imperialist school also failed to locate the intrinsic relation between Hinduism and Nationalism. Moreover it never bothered to problematize the nationality concept spearheaded by the national movement, which tried to imagine different nationalities as a homogenous unit. It alleged that the national movement represented only the aspirations of elite upper class.

None of the historiographies considers the important dynamic social factor, ie caste as the dynamic force of Indian society. Caste and its oppressive institutions ghettoized the majority of the population in the most inhuman fashion, which determined the basic contradiction of the society. This reality was never understood in the way it should have been. To the Marxists, the problems related to caste would finally be solved once the class contradictions settled. This mechanical Marxist position never offered an insight into the problem of caste and its manifold implications.

We have already mentioned the examples of *Alumuttill Channar* and C. Krishnan, despite their economic position how they were deprived of their freedom of movement. C. Kesavan narrated another interesting episode of a rich Ezhava named '*Kunjatha*', a coir business magnate in Travancore, who employed a Nair as his business '*Melnottakkaran*' (Overseer) among many others. Every evening this overseer furnished the daily business reports. The Ezhava trader asks his overseer '*Entokke Aayi Tampuran*'? '*Maalikku kalluvecho*' (what all happened my lord, whether coconut husks are immersed?) The overseer replies, '*illada Kunjatha*' (No you fellow, *Kunjatha*).¹⁹ No amount of economic wealth was enough to changes one's social position.

The assertions by the oppressed castes and the consequent development during the colonial rule were viewed by the dominant historiographies as a colonial construct. Marxists along with a majority of nationalists saw the

¹⁹ C. Kesavan, *op.cit.*, p.226.

movements of non – caste Hindus during the colonial rule as basically divisive and pro-British. This was due to the belief that the main contradiction was between the oppressed Indian nationality and imperialism.²⁰ The question of caste and untouchability were never viewed as serious issues. E.M.S Nambudiripad while discussing the Gandhi - Ambedkar confrontation, in the wake of Mac Donald's award and the fast unto death announced by Gandhi [1932 September 20] and the consequent Poona Pact [1932 September 24] observed ... 'However, this was a great blow to the freedom movement. For this led to the diversion of the people's attention from the object of full independence to mundane cause of the upliftment of Harijans'.²¹

The developments during the period between 1930 –32- Mac Donald's announcement – Gandhi's fast – Poona pact - were the examples of silencing the depressed communities, by granting them space in the political sphere. The Indian national political sphere had a clear value base of the national movement, which in turn was the logical- political culmination of the caste Hindu social reform movement inaugurated by Rajaram Mohan Roy.²² In a famous letter written in 1828, the year *Brahma Samaj* was established; Rajaram Mohan Roy stated his conviction on the Indian political advance. 'I regret to say' he wrote 'that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interest. The distinction of caste, introducing innumerable divisions and sub divisions among them has entirely deprived them of patriotic feelings and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking difficult enterprise.... It is, I think necessary that some change

²⁰ Gail Omvedt, 1994. *Dalits and Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and Dalit movements in Colonial India*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, p.14.

²¹ E.M.S. Nambudiripad, 1986. *A History of Indian Freedom Movement*, Trivandrum, Social Scientist Press, p.492.

²² M.M. Khan, 'Karthrutwatinte Prashnangal Chuvadurakkatha Anweshanangal' (The Problems of Subjecthood; Unsteady Inquiries), *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*, 25 September 2005, Book No. 83, Issue no. 70, pp. 76-77.

should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort'.²³

The renaissance movement in general and SNM in particular considered the caste system and its oppressive institution as the basic contradiction and that the colonial governmentality enabled them to breathe an air of freedom. They viewed colonial domination as a positive source to challenge the internal colonialism²⁴ under which they have been reeling for long centuries and experiencing untold miseries.

The subaltern perception on colonial domination was radically different from that of Nationalists. Indian national movement assumed Hindu chauvinist overtones in *Swadeshi – Boycott* movement in the wake of Bengal division. The *Swadeshi* mood in general was closely associated with attempts to combine politics with religious revivalism which was repeatedly used as a morale booster for activists and a principal instrument of mass contact.²⁵ More radical nationalist aspirations were clearly rooted in aggressive Hinduism. The umbilical cord relation between nationalism and Hinduism became exposed in a telling fashion. 'The compulsion to create a national identity on the premise of Hindu religion and pursue a collective destiny have been murderously homogenizing and oppressively marginalizing the non-caste Hindus'.²⁶

²³ Charles. H. Heimsath, 1964. *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, p.11 from *The English works of Rajaram Mohan Roy*, 1906. Jogendra Chandra Ghose (ed.), Allahabad, pp. 929-30.

²⁴ Internal Colonialism. Used here as a sociological concept to explain the oppression inflicted by the caste Hindus and their total hegemony over the oppressed castes for long centuries. Robert Blauner, who studied the Blacks of America, discriminated in racial lines and Michel Hechter who analysed British domination over Scottish, Irish and Welsh people, developed the concept of internal colonialism as a sociological category. See, Robert Blauner, 1972. *Racial Oppressions in America*, New York, Harper & Row. Michael Hechter, 1977. *The Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, Berkely & Los Angels, University of California Press.

²⁵ Sumit Sarkar, 1983, Rpt. (1995). *Modern India 1885 – 1947*, Madras, Macmillan India, p.114.

²⁶ Shahid Amin, 'Patriotism for the Oppressed', *The Hindu* 3 December 2006.

It is very significant to note how SNDP Yogam viewed this agitation of the national movement, certainly an eye opener and the position is emphatic and unequivocal.

‘Every one would admit that India is a vast land with numerous religions, innumerable languages and still more castes and dialects within these religions and languages. It is clear that unity required for self rule will never materialize in India in the near future. *If we are going to rule India by ourselves we will be going backward the same distance that we have advanced during the last 150 years of English rule.* So long as the caste system prevails strongly in India, Indians will never be equipped to rule themselves without the help of others. We don’t think that the freedom allowed to all castes under the present rule will be given to them by the Indian rulers. We don’t believe that any caste that has suffered the painful results of the caste system for centuries will ever join them’.²⁷

This is a clear warning to those who attempt to posit the renaissance movements of Kerala with the tools of dominant historiography. This pronouncement throws light on many areas. It may be perhaps for the first time in the history of modern Kerala an organization declared loudly the plural nature of the Indian society and also took a deep look into its diversities. This posture of SNDP Yogam interrogated the concept that nation-in making evolved through anti-British struggle. To them the end of English rule was retrogression to the 18th century.

This position also offered a sharp criticism to the very rationale of Marxist historiography’s periodization of history. To the Marxist historiographers the parameter is social change and not the rise or decline of an empire. Then they attribute the beginning of modern period in India to the revolt of 1857 implying that the social structure changed with it. Extending his profound solidarity with the rebels K. Marx through his writings in *New York Daily Tribune* expressed the view that it was not a military mutiny but a

²⁷ ‘Swaraj Vazhakku’ (Swaraj Dispute), *Vivekodayam*, October – November 1907. (*Thulam 1083M.E*) Book No. 4, Issue No. 7, pp. 4-5. (*Emphasis added*)

national revolt.²⁸ The series of articles by Marx undoubtedly gave one of the best graphic accounts of the economic exploitation of the East India Company. In his opinion the revolt of 1857 was the resistance of the oppressed Indian masses against the colonial rule.

Hence in Marxist historiography's view, the modern period in Indian history starts with the revolt of 1857, a concrete beginning of anti-British struggle. Did the revolt aim at any social change? Even a preliminary enquiry in to the nature and objective of the revolt gives a negative answer. The revolt was rather intended to restore the old order. Marxists did not contextualize the content of the revolt. Kathleen Gough, the leading anthropologist who had done many works on Kerala society also studied the nature of peasant uprisings during the colonial period in India, classified the revolt of 1857 in the 'restorative' category.²⁹

Subaltern perception on colonial rule can be illustrated with another incident. Angengo fort and surrounding areas lay within the geographical ambit of Travancore, but was directly ruled by the British government and it was put under administrative supervision of Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu) Collector. When the British resident visited the place on 21 June 1891, he summoned the natives of Angengo and mooted an idea of transferring the territory to Travancore for administrative convenience. He wanted the response of the natives on it, for which the local people of Angengo replied:

'We the people of this locality, born in Her Majesty's land (Queen of England) enjoy unlimited happiness. Our government discharge reasonable justice to all irrespective of being Brahmin, Sudra, Ezhava and Pulaya. It offers us government jobs according to our qualifications. Here all castes enjoy accessibility and freedom everywhere including in the courts of law. Our government has not bestowed property rights of these places to Brahmanas

²⁸ Karl Marx, *op.cit.*, pp. 44-48 and Irfan Habib, *op.cit.*, p. 51ff.

²⁹ Kathleen Gough, 'Indian Peasant Uprising', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, April 1974, pp. 1391-1412.

and Sudras. Here nobody considers others as slaves. In Travancore a person from lower caste can't even get a peon post, where the hardship they undergo knew no bounds.

So we the subjects of Her Majesty the Queen see profound grief in becoming the slaves of Brahmanas and Sudras of Travancore. For our freedom and happiness, Your Excellency (*Saheb*) is the best example. Now we submit before you without any fear as we do before our parents. In Travancore we cannot approach a *Tahsildar* or even a peon'.³⁰

The Resident then assured that he would not implement the transfer. Time and again SNDP Yogam reposed its faith and confidence in British administration and declared that it was the British rule that gave them freedom and security, which they did not experience in native rule.

Rao Bahadur Oyitti krishnan B.A, B.L while delivering the presidential address in the 6th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Ernakulam Maharaja's College hall on 16 May 1909 observed.

'Let me tell you here that one of the most sacred duties we have to set before ourselves is to be un swerving in our loyalty to the British government We ought never to forget that it was under the government that we first tasted the sweets of liberty and it was its protecting arm that enabled us to elevate ourselves to our present position. We shall be guilty of the basest ingratitude if we at any time failed in our fealty to it'.³¹

To the subaltern castes the colonial rule was a different experience. Among the writers belonging to dominant historiography, some endorsed certain positive aspects of colonial modernity in a guarded manner. On the other hand, to the oppressed castes, colonial modernity was an extremely different real life experience. This also points to the limitations of the existing discourse on modernity.

³⁰ P. Bhaskaranunni, 2005. *Keralam Irupatham Noottandinte Arambhathil* (Kerala in the Beginning of 20th Century) Thrissur, Kerala Sahitya Akademy, p.214.

³¹ *Vivekodayam*, April-May 1909(*Medom & Edavom 1084 M.E*), Book No.6 Issue No.1& 2, p.7.

Nationalist movement, the synonym of anti – British struggle was definitely engaged in the process of nation making which had least impact among the Ezhava community. This cannot be viewed as an all time phenomenon. There were ups and downs and deviations that made matters more complex. Even at the height of deviation in favour of integration with national movement to redress the social grievances experienced by the community, there were strong differences. This flux was best illustrated in the presidential address by C. Krishnan at the 22nd annual conference of SNDP Yogam held at Karthikapally, Muthukulam English Middle school on 7-9 May 1925. C.Kishnan who brilliantly conceived the relation between the nationalism and Hindu religion, made a scathing attack on both.

‘I must admit that such epithets as mother land, *Bharathmata* and *Desabandhu* etc. are ear splitting to me. It is headache to hear the name of *Bharatmata* who tramples under foot millions of peoples. When I remember what the *Bharatmata* has done to my community and other suffering communities and who always side with the strong, I will never be contented with showering abuses on this mother. We are spending our time as the slaves of this mother and her dear children. The history of Travancore and other native states bears testimony to the misery that we undergo on political matters as well.

It is because we have always to fight with the Hindus that we could not achieve anything like Christian community and others. If we are to get admission in schools, if we are to get jobs, if we are to go near public roads and temples, let alone use them, we have to fight.

These *Iyengars* and *Shastris* would shed profuse tears on the inequity in Africa and the damage done to the Caliphate in Turkey. But in this country their conduct is like this. Those who come under this severe oppression constitute not a few hundreds of thousands but so many millions. If our community alone is taken along with the *Nadars* in Travancore it would be more than 2 millions. The illustrious king of Baroda has only 2.1 million subjects. Our community alone would be eight times the subjects of the king of Kochi. Palestine which shot into fame recently has only a total population 8 lakhs.

Now we have to understand the principle behind what Mahatma Gandhi, Mr. C.R. Das and others say about saving Indians from the domination of Europeans. What they say is that if

a people are subjugated by some others they would not prosper. I want to ask why the same principle cannot be adopted by the low castes who are said to be Hindus.

Actually at present as well as in the past, we don't belong to the Hindu Community. You only dream that you are Hindus. If in fact, you belong to the Hindu community your plight cannot be like this, because you constitute such a numerical strength. If the downtrodden people are still kissing the chains they are tied with, then it shows only their ignorance and lack of thought'.³²

This pronouncement was done at the time when Vaikam Sathyagraha was going on. It was in fact T.K. Madhavan who persuaded C. Krishnan to preside over the meeting. T.K. Madhavan who became a Congress member at the end of 1923 was the chief architect of Vaikom Satyagraha. SNM in its early phase had leaders like C. Krishnan and *Sahodaran* K. Ayyappan who consistently problematized the national movement and the Hindu religion. The Indian nation pre-supposed the collective will of an imagined Hindu people. The national aspirations were founded on the presumption of the socio-political irrepresentability of the oppressed castes by themselves. Their identity or self was mediated through the national movement.

The nationalist leadership was well aware of the immanent collapse of the movement, as that of the nation, if the oppressed castes represent themselves

³² *Desabhimani*, 23 May 1925.

(This is the famous weekly news paper edited by T.K. Madhavan, First issue came out on 17 April 1915 (*4 Medam 1090 M.E*). *Desabhimani* was published from Quilon, first printed at Sree Krishna Vilasom Press and subsequently at Sree Rama Vilasom Press, Quilon. T.K. Narayanan was the editor between 1915 and 1916, but T.K. Madhavan was the *defacto* during this period. Madhavan officially took the charge of editorship in January 1917 and continued in the same position till his death on 27 April 1930. The paper was owned and managed by Kayyalakkal Padhmanabhan Channar of Alumoottil family).

C.Krishnan, (*Changaram kumarath Krishnan 1867 – 1938*) B.A, B.L was the prominent Tiyya (Ezhavas are called as Tiyyas in Malabar) leader and the editor of *Mitavadi*. He was closely associated with the SNDP Yogam right from the beginning. During 1912 – 33 he presided over seven annual sessions of SNDP Yogam. He was entrusted to manage the affairs of *Aluva Advaitasramam* and the institutions under it as their *Dharmakartha* by Narayana Guru himself vide Guru's own hand written letter to C. Krishnan dated 2 *Edavom 1094 M.E* (16 May 1919), shows his credibility and position within the Sree Narayana Movement. The full text of the letter was published in *Desabhimani*, 10 *Edavom 1094 M.E* (24 May 1919).

without the medium of Hinduism. So every effort was considered to accommodate them. This strategy of accommodation and diffusion proved to be a success in a considerable way. As SNDP Yogam pointed out in 1907 there were irremediable linguistic, regional and caste diversities which created mutual incompatibility. So the national movement, the logical-political culmination of the Hindu reform movement, invented a comprehensive category to forge the multiple strands - 'Nationalism', which could effectively be used to silence the potentials of multiplicity.

By making the pan Indian caste Hindu myth symbols as the icons of nation, during 1905-15 the process of 'othering' intensified. Muslims in general were branded as proper and primary 'others'. A strenuous effort had been made to create an artificial unity among the Hindus spread over various castes, by invoking *savarna* myth symbols from epics and *puranas*. Thus a feeling of Hindu was cultivated by the national movement, which was translatable into the sense of a nation.

Another feature which invites our attention is that whenever the internal colonialist forces became weak, due to external intervention, the oppressed castes could enjoy social mobility. Some remarkable studies about the social mobility of oppressed castes, who remained outside the *varna* system, during the Delhi sultanate period attest this fact.³³ The linkage between internal colonialism and immobility of subaltern sections are found missing in Marxist historiography due to its own ideological positions. Even those who point out that the Marxian analytical method has certain fundamental defects in appraising the Indian condition believe that the *Kisan* and Trade union movements led by the Communist Party had not received adequate attention in the history of national movement and it was a big drawback. Even then they

³³ Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, 'Social Mobility in the Delhi Sultanate' in Irfan Habib (ed.), 1992. *Medieval India I Researches in History of India 1200 – 1750*, Centre for Advanced Study in History, Aligarh Muslim University, Delhi, Oxford University Press (OUP), pp. 23 – 48.

have not given serious thoughts to the issues of caste and related institutions in modern Indian history.³⁴

Caste and related institutions worked as the absolute determinants of social dynamics in Kerala. The caste clearly exercised control over the whole gamut of an individual as well as community life.³⁵ In this regard dominant historiographies suffer from its own structural blocks, since the very design is meant for analysing macro processes and large phenomena like nationalism and colonialism. The appropriation regarding the beginning of modern period in Indian History by the Marxist historiography unconsciously provided stronger theoretical support to the efforts to tame and discipline factors that were thought to be unfavourable to imagine the nation. This did have far reaching impact on history writings, particularly visible in the history text books being taught in schools. In a brilliant analysis Sumit Sarkar observes that the main purpose of history in schools is to inculcate correct values, stimulate national unity, integration and pride: a special burden imposed on no other subject.³⁶

The colonial rule had deeper impacts and far reaching social consequences. It activated the oppressed castes who were reeling under the yoke of internal colonialism. The first waves of this caused drastic changes within Hinduism and resulted in the emergence of Hindu reform movements in the beginning of the first half of the 19th century. The beliefs and practices vogue in the social fabric began to be interrogated and Hinduism was subjected to self-examination. It reached a point where it could not but effect reforms. Parallel to the Hindu socio-reform movement, non-caste Hindu resurgence also became evident. New challenges came from the 'caste-movements' in such a way that the Hindu reform movements found themselves unable to proceed in the line they followed. New strategies were devised by caste Hindus to confront this

³⁴ Irfan Habib, *op.cit.*, pp.1 – 13.

³⁵ P.Bhaskaranunni, 2000. *Pathonpatham Nootandile Keralam* (Kerala in the 19th Century), Thrissur, Kerala Sahitya Akademy, pp.92-252.

³⁶ Sumit Sarkar, 'History Text Books: The Need to Move Forward', *The Hindu*, 5 July 2005.

challenge forcing them to organize politically, thus anti – British struggle was emerged. This content of the national movement was intelligently recognized by the early leadership of the social movements in Kerala, particularly the *Narayana* movement. The national movement could not cast any significant impact in Kerala during 1905-15, hey days of community formation, precisely due to this recognition. In the case of Travancore the national movement had to wait longer to register its presence.

Alternative Paradigms: Challenge Stays Intact - Subaltern and Post Colonial Studies

Subaltern studies that emerged in early 1980's by subjecting sharp criticism to the elitist historiography liberated it from the hinges of nationalism vs colonialism paradox. With the emergence of subaltern school different interpretations and studies on nationalism and colonialism came up. It brought peasants, agricultural workers, tribals and other marginalized sections into the chief domain of modern Indian history's discourse. They were locked in the periphery and were considered to be unable to organize themselves and would be organised only if mobilized from 'above'. Thus Subaltern studies deconstructed the methodology of elitist historiography.

The main content of the subaltern studies is to establish the independent and authoritative role of those subalterns banished from the processes that made the nation and national consciousness possible. Through their studies they brought these sections into limelight who had been denied space in the nation making process.

'The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism Both these varieties of elitism share the prejudice that the making of Indian nation and the development of consciousness– nationalism – which informed this process, were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements.

What, however, historical writing of this kind cannot do is to explain Indian nationalism for us. For it fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism. In this particular respect the poverty of this historiography is demonstrated beyond doubt by its failure to understand and assess the mass articulation of this nationalism except, negatively, as a law and order problem, and positively, if at all, either as a response to the charisma of certain elite leaders or in the currently more fashionable terms of vertical mobilization by the manipulation of factions.³⁷

The main bone of contention between the subaltern studies and the elitist historiography is the question of the roles played by the subalterns. Subaltern historiography seriously attempted to locate the subaltern masses in the struggles during the colonial period and give them an independent and respectable position in the making of nation. They criticized the elitist historiography which ignored the independent contribution of the subalterns to the national conscientization.

To interpret modern Indian history, the basic parameter and defining principle is the question of nation and nationality; on which both subaltern and elitist historiography have no disagreement. Subaltern school doesn't offer a critique to the monolithic and uncontextualized reading on nation by the elitist historiography. R. Guha made it clear that their aim was to establish the fact that the subaltern assertion and their participation in national movement had been quite independent and not with the ideas and mediations of elitist leadership. An attempt on the same line of subaltern studies series also came up from Sumit Sarkar during the same period.³⁸

³⁷ Ranajith Guha, 'On Some Aspects of Historiography in Colonial India', in Ranajith Guha (ed.), 1982. *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vol.1, Delhi, OUP, pp.1 – 3.

³⁸ Sumit Sarkar, 1983. *Popular Movement and Middle Class Leadership in Late Colonial India: Perceptions and Problems of History From Below*, New Delhi, K.P. Bagchi & Company, Passim.

The question is how we place a group of people that had numerical majority among the oppressed castes of Kerala by the parameters of Subaltern historiography. The Ezhavas of Kerala were no way connected or never bothered the mediations of the process of nation and its making. In fact they consciously distanced themselves from 'the process of nation making' in their elevation to the status of a self authority or the subject agents of their own. In the formative stage of community making, the Ezhavas believed that the process which transformed the national feeling into the self expression of the people of India i.e., making of the nation through anti-British struggle was against their interests. Ezhavas felt that if the demands of the national movement were achieved, their condition would go 150 years backwards. This perception is so vital and it is a pointer to formulate new historiography, to posit the movements like Ezhavas which significantly changed the course of modern Kerala history.

Again the SNDP Yogam severely denounced the supporters of extreme nationalism and called them as '*Swadeshi Kollakkar*' (Native Dacoits). It passed a resolution condemning the unsuccessful bomb attack on the Viceroy, Hardinge, who was attending the celebrations conducted in connection with the shifting of capital from Calcutta to Delhi, on 23 December 1912.³⁹ It shows that the politics of Ezhavas was fundamentally different from that of national movement and could not be appropriated by the tools of subaltern historiography. Though subaltern historiography differs with nationalist history writings the hesitations or the difficulties of breaking with the overwhelming paradigms are also there. 'The assertions of the lower castes have been contemptuously called castiest, communal and chauvinistic movements. These labels of course have been part of the weaponry of the traditionalist discourse accepted *in toto* by academicians of all hues'.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Vivekodayam*, May-June 1913 (*Medom- Edavam 1088 M.E*), Book No. X, Issue No, I & II p.28.

Resolution No. 1 – Condemning the attack on Hardinge was moved by Kottiyathu Ramunni, seconded by Callungal Madathil Rarichan Mooppan, unanimously adopted in the 10th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Commercial School Hall, Kozhikode on 19 – 20 May 1913.

⁴⁰ G. Aloysius, 1997. *Nationalism Without A Nation in India*, Delhi, OUP, p.7.

Apart from these limitations, other shortcomings of the subaltern school pointed out by historians like Sumit Sarkar who once closely associated with this project, highlighted the theoretical weakness of subaltern historiography.⁴¹ The attempts of subaltern historiography to appropriately place the subalterns in the nation making process expose a serious limitation of the school. They question elite historiographies, only to give deserving place to subalterns in the nation making realm, thus it fails to distinguish the distinctive character of the subaltern caste assertions.

Post Colonial Studies, developed since the publication of Edward Said's '*Orientalism*', made significant contributions to studies in colonialism and societies once under colonial rule. They also failed to address the subtleties of caste and its oppressive institutions, served as the axis of internal colonialism. Post Colonial Studies also consider India as a homogenous unit as if it had an authoritative national tradition and culture. They defined Orientalism and Indology as the part of the enlightenment project of imperialism, which imposed a culture of docility over the Indians by denying their own national culture. They never considered the factors which interrogated nation, national culture and tradition. Post Colonial Studies blindly endorse the idea of national culture and national society without looking into merits of these claims. They also failed to understand the process of 'internal otherings'. Writers like Ronald Inden, based on the theoretical observations of Edward Said considers the hierarchical structure of relations in the society based on caste, Hindu domination and communalism as constructions of colonial rule.⁴²

The entire burden of oppression and marginalization experienced by the majority population in this subcontinent for long centuries are put on the shoulders of colonial regime. Thus through a weak theoretical cloak they tried

⁴¹ Sumit Sarkar, 2002. *Writing Social History*, New Delhi, OUP, pp.82 – 108.

⁴² Ronald Inden, 1990. *Imagining India*, New Delhi, OUP, *Passim*.

to deconstruct the reality of social mobility and consequent identity assertions of the oppressed castes during the colonial period.

In this regard CA Bayly's study, explaining pre-colonial structure of the society and its in-built caste-Hindu hegemony and Hindu communalism can be considered as an effective reply to the post colonial theorists.⁴³ Sumit Sarkar establishes that 'uncritical acceptances of post colonial position and post modern theories are intellectually unpalatable'.⁴⁴

Possibilities: Prospects and Barriers

New initiatives are therefore required to posit the transition of Kerala's modern history, particularly to unravel the flux of the Ezhava community on which this study focuses. Ezhava community's identity formation and their elevation to the subjecthood are the issues in this regard. It cannot be analyzed with the tools of the available historiographies, in the light of discussion held above. The specific features of social history of Travancore had been evolved through the identity assertions and conflicts between various communities. The lack of studies showing similarities of such a peculiar situation with other regions might have stood in the way of the emergence of a historiography capable of explaining such specific situations.

The problem is not that we can find many similarities in various other regions in India, though not in the patterns of caste oppression and social inequity as in the case of Kerala, particularly that of Travancore. The state of Travancore, the oft proclaimed model state *Dharma Rajya* existed just to preserve and maintain a social system erected on the pedestals of caste laws and that was its ultimate mission. Maintaining the social inequality based on caste

⁴³ C.A. Bayly, 2001. *Origins of Nationality in South India*, New Delhi. OUP, *Passim*

⁴⁴ Sumit Sarkar, 2002. 'Postmodernism and the Writing of History' in *Beyond Nationalist Frames; Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History*, Delhi, Permanent Black, pp.154-94.

system was deemed necessary to keep order, peacefulness and normality. Any deviation to the contrary was considered as *Dharmabrahmsham*, abnormal and a severe threat to order and peace. Caste system functioned here as an overarching ideology which pervaded all aspects of every day life. In Travancore each section of the people recaptured its deserving position in the political sphere of the civil society through community formation and by incessant and severe struggle among various castes. How far the pattern of social change in Travancore had been similar to that of other regions is a moot question.

If these issues are considered important then it is necessary to have new kind of historiography to situate the development of such a distinctive society. In this direction a historiography is yet to be evolved. This study concentrating on the development of Ezahava community during the last decades of 19th and early 20th century in the context of activities of T.K. Madhavan is at best can be termed a very modest attempt.

A number of scholars have approached modern Kerala history in a different way. Undoubtedly they all showed the direction in which Kerala society has advanced. Among them, the significant interventions were done by T.K. Ravindran, M.S.A. Rao, K.K. Kusuman, Dick Kooiman, B. Sobhanan, Robert.L. Hardgrave, R.N. Yesudas, M.J. Koshy, P Bhaskaranunni, J.W. Gladstone etc. We do not make here an attempt to examine each one of their studies. But we find some structural issues are left unaddressed, more vital to formulate a new historiographic model.

An attempt in recent times in this direction has been made by J. Reghu who point out the necessity of a new historiography by contextualizing the Sree

Narayana movement.⁴⁵ The modernization and democratization of Kerala society became possible through the different castes, asserting their rights and establishing them in the civil society. That is to say, Kerala's renaissance has been a process of realizing the democratic aspirations of various castes.

After a certain stage, making of the Ezhava community went on diverse directions, in such a flux that it is impossible to make any kind of simplification about it. At one point Ezhavas had to engage not only caste and religion but also nation and nationality much to the annoyance of radicals within the community. In such an extraordinary circumstance we can see the community was grappling with intense internal conflict, which assumed many proportions. For example the conversion surge, qualitatively different from the earlier one, affected the community with different overtones. Once this euphoria gripped the community, those who clamor for position within the Hindu religion had also changed their strategies, with least compromise to their central argument. This was nearly a unique phenomenon prevailed among the Ezhavas.

Ezhava assertion can be viewed as a distinct resurgence since it was against a social set up and a state apparatus, existed to protect caste system. The identity of the Ezhavas remained invalid within the religion, attempted a resurrection without the mediation of that religion. But this process never progressed on this line alone. Community making with the mediation of religion also witnessed along with a re-making without its mediation. This complexity, as mentioned above necessitates new historiography.

This also poses another challenge. Is it relevant to have an alternative historiography considering the complexities of Ezhava community alone? Though this points to the possibilities of multiple historiographic models –the

⁴⁵ J.Reghu, *Sree Narayana Prasthanam Keralathinte Yuvathuamanu* (Sree Narayana Movement has been the Youth of Kerala), *Madhyamam Weekly*, 21 November 2003 – 19 March 2004, (15 Issues).

central tendencies of modern Kerala history must be taken into consideration; i.e. the making of communities primarily determines the transformation process of modern Kerala and runs parallel to notions of nation making phenomenon. Highlighting the inadequacies of dominant economic historiographic models, a recent study on the rice lands of Kuttanad in Travancore, proposed the feasibility of a new framework to appropriate a micro region's economic history.⁴⁶ It shows that the alternative historiographic models are slowly taking roots in the specific context of Kerala society.

This study explores the changes that took place in the Ezhava community in a crucial period. Since these changes negotiated with nation and nationality, it had generated a number of distinct streams within the community. Independent and complementary factors facilitated this directional change. This change centered on T.K. Madhavan as he was principally instrumental for this deviation. The process of integration of renaissance movement with national political movement deflected the path in which Kerala society was progressing. The course would have been different had this not taken place. This integration facilitated political parties to take over the role played by the renaissance movements, first by the Congress and then by the Communist Party. Since then the debates on renaissance came to an end, particularly after 1950's. This proved very costly to Kerala society as it badly affected the democratisation process.

T.K. Madhavan's activities during 1915 - 30 at an extremely complex phase of the community had been very decisive in the social history of modern Kerala. His activities of this period got a historical significance since he placed the demand for temple entry of Ezhavas at the apex and pleaded that by achieving the right to enter into temples would naturally solve all other social inequities suffered by the community. To achieve this end he devoted almost

⁴⁶ K.T. Rammohan, 2006. *Tales of Rice: Kuttanad, South West India*, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, pp. 1-5.

half of his public life only to compromise later for *Sanchara Swathantryam* (freedom of movement) along the public roads running in front of the temples. Demand proper for temple entry of the Ezhavas which was shelved, dominated all other social issues of Travancore during 1917-24. Even during the civic right movement (1918-22), T.K. Madhavan effectively placed the demand for temple entry in its agenda. The details and intricacies of this strategy are discussed in chapter I. The overarching nature of the demand for temple entry compelled every community to take a position on this issue; hence a lot of debates and discussions were generated. This was a struggle against an inviolable system which was deeply rooted. Under normal circumstances we cannot expect that the Hindu religion will adopt a different attitude towards the oppressed castes despite pressing demands from them. These were the difficulties prompted Madhavan to employ a different struggle. Madhavan realized the fact that the social inequities of Ezhavas could not be solved through a direct confrontation with the Hindu religion. Other compelling situations also influenced Madhavan's decision to ally with national movement.

Till 1922 Madhavan was a strong critic of National movement and Gandhian method of struggle and he effectively utilized the news paper *Deshabhimani* edited by him for this purpose. *Deshabhimani* critiqued the Non-co-operation movement, the first major offensive against British rule led by Gandhiji. Then what prompted Madhavan to accept a shift and how are we to explain this change in direction? This was also a time when Ezhavas, the numerical majority among the non-caste Hindu population were seriously making effort to get out of the clutches of Hinduism. Conversion was thought out to be the answer to their predicament. Though this option came up many times previously also, at this particular juncture it assumed serious proportions in the context of severe tension between Ezhavas and upper castes. The rationale behind the conversion was much to do with the incessant riots in view of demand for temple entry and temple boycott movement. The manifestation of temple boycott (1920 December) movement was devastating and went beyond

the calculations of the leadership. Riots spiraled, so did conversion. Madhavan was left with no other alternative but to open a direct dialogue with the national movement and the consequences of this move were far reaching.

The family background of T. K. Madhavan on both maternal and paternal sides had a strong Hindu anchorage which might have been a formative influence in his perceptions. Moreover the relation between his family and Sree Narayana movement was well knit right from the beginning. This relation proved to be complementary. Apart from these factors Madhavan, all through his public life enjoyed unqualified support from Narayana Guru.

This study attempts to unravel all the niceties of the complex situation and to re-read T.K. Madhavan and his times.

Review of Literature

This doctoral thesis is largely based on the primary data collected from different archival repositories both official and private. The major primary source for the issues in question is derived from *Desabhimani* the paper edited by T. K. Madhavan. The present author can earnestly claim that almost all copies of the weekly news paper were painstakingly perused. Personal diaries and letters of T.K. Madhavan are also used in this thesis.

Vivekadodayam, the official organ of SNDP *Yogam* is used in this study as another important primary source. This author consulted original issues of the journal right from the first volume, which help us to know the exact position of SNDP *Yogam* on different issues and also provide authentic details of annual sessions of SNDP *Yogam*. Two other important journals widely consulted are *Mitavadi* edited by C. Krishnan and *Sahodaran* by K. Ayyappan.

The primary sources included the Cover, Confidential, Political and Judicial files from the Kerala of State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram and also from Regional archives, Kozhikode. The Travancore Legislative Council Proceedings, Sri Mulam Praja Assembly proceedings, Administrative Reports of Travancore, Regulation and Proclamations of Travancore, Gazette notifications, Census Reports, Government press statements, communiqués, police reports and other news items related to the subject are also extensively used. The original proceedings of the second session of SMPA were obtained from Oriental and India Office Collection, the British Library, London, as they could not be found in the libraries visited by the author in the State. Travancore Law Report (1896) is also consulted to gather details of the court verdict on the issue of *Sanchara Swatantryam*.

Native News Paper Reports, files relating to Freedom Movement, Political Department files, Confidential and Fortnightly Reports from Tamil Nadu archives are also used. *The Hindu* (News paper) archives and library, Chennai provided relevant issues of the paper related to the period. Various journals, pamphlets, articles from scores of libraries across the state are also used. Secondary sources included books, journals, souvenirs, newspapers, biographies and unpublished Ph.D theses etc.

Among the Ph.D theses examined, there is one on T.K. Madhavan done by N. Unnikrishnan who belonged to the Political Science discipline. The study attempted to narrate Madhavan's activities but did not problematize the issues involved in the period and no conceptualization is attempted. A serious handicap of this study is that it did not consult Desabhimani and Vivekodayam, the journals which are unavoidable in any study on T.K.Madhavan. (He states that these journals were 'unavailable')⁴⁷

⁴⁷ N. Unnikrishnan, 2004. *Socio-Political Transformation in Travancore; A Study of T.K. Madhavan*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Kerala.

Thulasi Bhai did another study on the 'History of the Agitation for Temple Entry' in her thesis submitted to University of Kerala.⁴⁸ Here the author failed to distinguish the difference between the demand for temple entry and the demand for freedom of movement on the roads running around or in front of the temples. She has mistakenly inferred that the *Satyagrahas* at Vaikom, Ambalapuzha and Suchindram etc are the agitation for temple entry. She has also published an article on *Poothotta Satyagraha and T. K. Madhavan* in Journal of Kerala Studies (September – December 1979, Vol.VI, Part III & IV pp. 559 – 565). She has also not consulted *Desabhimani*.

A comprehensive biography of T.K. Madhavan in two volumes by P.K. Madhavan is considered as the authentic account on T.K. Madhavan's life and activities, rated as one of the best biographies in Malayalam literature.⁴⁹ The present author widely used this biography in this thesis. Apart from this no serious and comprehensive attempts have been made by any scholar on T.K. Madhavan and his times, except articles or essays in souvenirs or in journals on specific issues.

This study stands apart from the studies mentioned above, as it is an enquiry aiming at a new historiographic model which may help appropriate the history of modern Travancore in the context of T.K. Madhavan's interventions. It considers the conceptual frameworks of the available historiographies that run parallel to the dynamics of modern Kerala history and postulates a different framework to map it. We can find enormous complexities and fluxes within the

⁴⁸ Thulasi Bai, 1986. *History of the Agitation for Temple Entry in Kerala*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Kerala,

⁴⁹ P.K. Madhavan, 1936. *T.K. Madhavante Jeeva Charitram* (Mal.) Biography of T.K. Madhavan, in Two Vols, M/s .Sarada Book Depot., Trivandrum, This illustrious biography of T.K. Madhavan in two volumes was written by P.K. Madhavan and his brother C.O. Kesavan. (P.K. Madhavan married Kayyalakkal Saradamma, daughter of T.K. Madhavan). First volume and the first part of the second volume were written by P.K. Madhavan (1899-1932) commonly accepted as the author of the biography who died before completing the work. C.O. Kesavan finished the rest of the book. C.O. Kesavan and Sardar K.M. Panikkar wrote separate introductions to this biography.

Ezhava community during the time of T.K. Madhavan, who played a stellar role in the making of the community. These fluxes underscore the potentials of a different model, and this study attempts to be a modest beginning in this regard. This study tries to unravel the undercurrents, which prompted T.K. Madhavan's socio-political interventions. The enquiry into the linkage between SNM and the national political movement is the core of this study.

Value Orientation and Pre-suppositions of the study

Available historiographies either dominant or the ones critiqued them are incapable and inadequate to appropriate the social transformation of Kerala society. Here a new framework is required to posit the transition. Assertions of various castes through incessant conflicts and tensions and the identity establishment must be the parameter for a new historiography. The history of modern Travancore often defies the realm of engagement of available models of historiographies. Here the social status was determined by caste hierarchy. The oppressed castes, in the process of changing their state of oppression, had naturally to come into conflict with the privileged castes. Unearthing the complexities of these caste conflicts and tensions, this study points to a new frame work.

The process of community formation of Ezhavas involved multi dimensional factors. It often materialized out of engagement with Hinduism and at times non-engagements with the religion. Different factions within the community dynamically contributed in this process. Mediations with nation and nationality or without it remained a central debate in the process of community formation.

The idea of conversion occupied a decisive place in the making of the Ezhava community. Confrontation with Hindu religion always generated new initiatives to redress the community grievances. Conversion had an important

role in bringing all major breakthroughs. Threat of conversion many a time influenced Madhavan's decisions. By re-reading his activities, the influence of religious conversion in Kerala society of that particular period can be understood better.

The perception conceived by T.K. Madhavan in his public life was considerably influenced by his family background which bears strong Hindu religious values. We find this Hindu anchorage both in his maternal and paternal family. Moreover T.K. Madhavan enjoyed unqualified support from Sree Narayana Guru; this made Madhavan unrelenting to those who opposed his initiatives.

To enlarge and widen the organizational network of SNDP Yogam T.K. Madhavan employed Hindu religious icons and characters through cultural performances and facilitated the integration of Ezhava community with national culture.

Integration of Ezhava social reform movement with national movement deflected the path in which Kerala society was advancing. Because of this the direction of Sree Narayana movement, instrumental for the democratization and modernization of Kerala has changed and it greatly affected the future course of Kerala society also.

Structure of the study

After a discussion on the methodology of available historiography the insights and observations of a new frame work for modern Travancore history have been pooled in the introduction. The conceptual structure used in this study is discernible in the introduction. It bears the method of treatment adopted in this study.

Followed by introduction there are four chapters and reflection.

The first chapter tracks the initial assertions of Ezhava community in Travancore and its manifold implications, impact of colonial intervention in terms of restructuring the existing power relations, expansion of print journalism and its social content. It also interrogates a major theoretical intervention of the 20th century on the emergence of nation and establishes that such theories are invalid in the context of role of print in Travancore. The discussion here is primarily focussed on the early public performances of T.K. Madhavan mediated through *Desabhimani* and the historic civic right movement with particular emphasis on the role played by him in reorienting the demands.

Ezhava community's negotiations with religion and nationalism are the chief concerns of the second chapter, analysed in the context of demand for temple entry. Huge implications and undercurrents are involved in this agitation. Conversion attempts, temple boycott, riots are dealt with in terms of their significance. Complexities and ruptures of the phenomenon immanent in this agitation are recaptured in this chapter. Prohibition campaign of T.K. Madhavan is also included.

The third chapter illustrates the exposition of T.K. Madhavan as a nationalist. Armed with its ideology and strategies, he backtracks from the demand for proper temple entry to *Sanchara Swatantryam*. Consequently Madhavan led a number of agitations euphemistically called as *Satyagraha* at Poothotta, Vaikom, Parur Kannankulangara, Ambalapuzha and Thiruvappu. He had a role in the agitation in Suchindram also. This part underscores the inner dynamics of these agitations.

The phenomenal achievements of T.K. Madhavan as the Organizing Secretary of SNDP Yogam are dealt with the fourth chapter. This part details the strategies and methods employed by him in realizing this end. It also locates

the linkage between the processes of expansion of the SNDP Yogam and the cultural imageries of nation.

Reflection part derives its shape by evaluating the arguments made in the study and also by looking into the ideological underpinnings of the perceptions held by T.K. Madhavan. He wished to lead a life of a *Sanathana Hindu*. This study is not concerned with the positions he maintained as an individual but on the other hand it proceeds to look into the aspects that shaped his public life and distilled his actions. The present study will attempt to contribute the initiatives to create an alternative historiography to appropriate modern Kerala history.

Society: Processes in Transition, T.K. Madhavan Takes Lead

Travancore, the *Dharama Rajya* was a state vowed to maintain and uphold an unequal social system based on caste and its oppressive institutions. This made the assertion and resurgence of non-caste Hindus extremely difficult and they paid a heavy price for it. The self representation by a section of people to make its own identity is viewed as the dynamic process in history. This appropriation of history by Keith Jenkins seems amazingly right, when we analyze the assertions and the processes of identity formation of Ezhavas in Travancore.¹

The Travancore state uncompromisingly maintained the values of the caste system. In the case of Travancore, the intricacies of caste system were not as simple as conceived by Louis Dumont, the modern structural sociologist. He held that the hierarchy of caste is based on the binary opposition of purity and pollution, which determined the relative rank of caste and also controlled the relation between them.² Many writers have contended this appropriation of caste by Dumont. For instance Duncan B. Forrester questioned it on two counts; that caste was essentially static in nature and it could not continue in a thoroughly secularized form.³

Nicholas B. Dirks considers that caste in pre-colonial South India was never just a religious concept based on purity and pollution. The king was not subordinate to the priest and the crown was never shallow.⁴ But here we cannot extend this into a cultural realm also. Caste intervened in the entire aspects of life and existence of an individual right from birth to death was finely tuned by

¹ Keith Jenkins, 1997. *Rethinking History*, London, Routledge, pp. 22-23.

² Louis Dumont, 1970. *Homo Hierarchies: The Caste System and Its Implications*, London, Widenfield and Nicholson, *passim*.

³ Duncan B. Forrester, 1980. *Caste and Christianity, Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo Saxon Protest and Mission in India*, London, Curzon Press, pp. 4 -5.

⁴ Nicholas. B. Dirks, 1982. *The Hollow Crown, Ethno History of an Indian Kingdom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.12.

caste considerations. Shekar Bandyopadhyay views that one of the major features of caste system, which in fact negates the basic thrust of colonial sociology and the Dumontian arguments, is that it has never been just a cultural category. It had important functional significance too, as each caste was associated with a hereditary traditional occupation that was indicative also of a social division of labour.⁵

But Travancore stands apart from these combinations and permutations. Here the immediate oppressors of Ezhavas were Nairs and among them reciprocal relations existed, transgressing the binary of purity and pollution. We have seen the cases of *Alumootil Channar*, the wealthiest among the Ezhavas who employed a Nair as his car driver and *Kunjatha* the Ezhava coir magnet who employed a Nair as his overseer. Moreover in Travancore the king enjoyed only a subordinate position to Brahmans. The political sovereignty in Travancore was legitimized only after obtaining the Brahmanical sanction. In ancient times '*Ettara Yogam*', literally means the council of eight and a half, convened in *Sree Padmanabha Swamy* temple which effectively controlled the power of the king. While the king enjoyed only a half vote, one Swamiyar, one Nair and six Pottis (Tamil Brahmins) exercised one full vote each.⁶ The *Azhavancherry Tamprakkal*,* left Travancore and settled beyond its territory, at Tripunithura in Cochin State on account of the 'low' status of rulers of Travancore. The status of king was subsequently acquired by

⁵ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 2004. *Caste, Culture and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, p.13.

⁶ Sankunni Menon, 'A History of Travancore from Earliest Times' cited in P.Bhaskaranunni, 1988, Rpt. (2000). *Pathonpatham Noottandile Keralam* (Kerala in the 19th Century), Thrissur, Kerala Sahitya Akademy, p.317.

* *Azhvancherry Tamprakkal* – The overlord of Namboodiri Brahmins in Kerala. The *Azhvancherry 'mana'* (Namboodiri's Residence) is at Adavanadu village in Malappuram. The king did not have the power to punish a Brahmin, but *Azhvancherry Tamprakkal* had. *Dravidian Encyclopedia*, 1993. Trivandrum, The International School of Dravidian Language, Vol.2, p.24.

Hiranya Garbham.^{**} There was no proper judicial dispensation and written code of law during the 16th and 17th centuries but only the custom or 'Maryada' based on caste system which decided every aspect of social life. Trial by ordeal (*Sathya Praeeksha*) was the common form of punishment inflicted upon the persons who allegedly committed crimes. But no punishment was applicable to Brahmins despite the gravest crimes committed by them. They can be given only minor punishments and that too if they are deserted by their caste, for which also it required the sanction of *Azhvanchery Tamprakkal*.

What is attempted here is not to elaborate the social customs and their manifold implications prevailed in Travancore but to point out a simple fact that the social dynamics of Travancore was not yielding to the tools employed by those writers who seriously pondered over the caste question. But at the same time Nicholas B. Dirks subsequently forced to take a different position as he had observed 'caste had always been political and it had been shaped in fundamental ways by political struggle and process'.⁷ Dipankar Gupta also challenged the position of Dumont and argues that fixed hierarchy is arbitrary and valid only from the perspective of individual caste. He on the other hand speaks on discrete caste and muddled hierarchies in the process of founding caste system that will not allow fixed hierarchies based on binary opposition.⁸ One thing is clear that these authors did not consider the importance of *Dharma* dimension of caste and so the sovereignty of Brahmins as the earthy embodiment of *Dharma*.

^{**} *Hiranya Garbham*: Ceremony which legitimizes the kingship. It is performed in a large golden vessel or in a tub with a cover of gold. Inside the vessel is placed a mixture of the five products of the cow (*Pancha Gavya*), i.e., cow's milk, yoghurt, ghee, urine and dung. After many preparatory rites the King enters the golden tub, the cover is put on, he bathe and offers prayer inside for ten minutes, while the assembled priests continue and praying and chanting hymns. After coming out, he is again crowned by the chief priest and is supposed to be advanced in caste purity and religious privileges as well as full authorization to reign over his people.

Samuel Mateer, 1883. *Native Life in Travancore*, London, W.H. Allen & Co., pp.130.

⁷ Nicholas B. Dirks, 2001. *Caste of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p.13.

⁸ Dipankar Gupta, 2000. *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, pp.77-85.

The customs practiced in Travancore were extremely savage. Umpteen sources both native and foreign attest to this fact. The upper castes enjoyed the right to kill a lower caste individual if the latter did not observe the prescribed distance and thereby polluted the former.⁹ The institution of caste scrupulously penetrated into every group and resulted in creating numerous sub castes within the castes. There were 180 Hindu castes enumerated in Travancore which were again divided into 578 sub castes.¹⁰

The census statistics in Travancore always evoked great enthusiasm and caused serious concerns among the upper castes. Successive censuses proved erosion among the Hindu population and it caused serious alarm. The oppression and social inequity suffered by the lower castes prompted them to leave Hindu religion. Thus the census results were closely watched by the upper castes as it posed a serious challenge to Hindu religion and at the same time it was used as an effective tool to imagine the all powerful Hindu community as a whole. Census data became a subject of intense debate during the Civic Right agitation (1918-22) and temple entry demand of Ezhavas – purportedly unleashed to stall the exodus. Kumaran Asan, who locked horns with T.K. Madhavan on various issues including temple entry demand passionately presented the plight of Hindus by using census data. Kenneth W. Jones observes, 'the habit of turning to the census [by Indians] for suggestive data was strengthened and then dramatically heightened during the first decades 20th century'.¹¹

The ghettoization of lower castes was unparalleled as they lived with no rights of human beings in Travancore. They were considered unapproachable

⁹ Samuel Mateer, *op.cit.*, p.291.

¹⁰ *Travancore Census Report (TCR) 1891, Along with Imperial Census of India, 1894*. V. Nagam Aiya (Dewan Peischar and Census Commissioner), Madras, Addison & Co., Vol.1, p.101.

¹¹ Kenneth W. Jones, 'Religious Identity with Indian Census' in N. Gerald (ed.), *The Census in India: New Perspectives*, 1981. New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, p.88.

and untouchable, therefore suffered from many civil and religious disabilities.¹² Regimentation was so percolated that every aspect of life was pre-designed and pre determined. Body movements, terms of addressing others, deference in speech were all regulated. The well entrenched customs and practices were strictly followed on matters regarding dwelling, ornaments, clothes, house hold utensils, food and in giving names also. From the name of a person, one could almost definitely infer the caste to which she/ he belonged. Michel Ralph Trouillot correctly observes that 'name sets up a field of power'.¹³ For a lower caste person to fry a *Pappadam* (pappad) requires prior sanction from authorities.¹⁴

The practice of *Ayitham* (Untouchability) was severely followed and any deviation from it invited even capital punishment. Ezhavas and Pulayas had to keep 32 and 64 feet respectively from the Brahmins. The very sight of a Nayadi would force a Brahmin to undergo ritual purification.¹⁵

The severity of internal colonialism carefully captured the bodies of Avarnas. The body colonization was so telling as evident from the fact that in referring to their body parts or organs, the lower caste people had to prefix adjectives showing their lower status when they were in conversation with the people from upper castes. The lower caste people had to keep their body above the waist uncovered to distinguish them from others. The cultural values of caste system were so deep rooted and even the outcastes accepted the values of caste system without much apprehension. Those who attempted to violate custom met with severe embarrassment. Even within the family of an outcaste, everyone was vigilant not to violate the dress code. C. Kesavan narrates an

¹² M.S.A. Rao, 1979. *Social Movements and Social Transformation*, Madras, Macmillan, p.5.

¹³ Michel Ralph Trouillot, 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History*, Boston, Beacon Press, p.115.

¹⁴ *Archives New Letter*, Vol. 1, Nos I and II, March-June 1975, Trivandrum, Directorate of State Archives. [Reproduced from the Diaries of Dewan of Cochin, who sent reply to the petitioner (Petition No. 30/1826), who sought permission from the government to provide *Valiya Pappadam* (Big Pappads) and sugar to the guests invited for the marriage of his daughter]

¹⁵ George Wood Cock, 1952. *Kerala, A Portrait of the Malabar Coast*, Oxford, OUP, p. 25.

incident of his own family, when Mrs. C.V. Kunjiraman who dared to cover her bosom with *Ravukka* (blouse) met the wrath of her mother. (C. Kesavan married Vasanthi, the daughter of C. V. Kunjiraman.) But C.V. tacitly approved the fancy of his wife. Mrs. Kunjiraman admitted that she felt shy when she wore the *Ravukka*.¹⁶

C.M. Agur in his monumental work observed, 'Travancore is perhaps the most conventional of all native states of India, little affected by foreign invasion and much retaining the old superstitions and religious prejudices and here the people scrupulously followed them only to perpetuate the religious feelings of the people'.¹⁷ It is pathetic to know the conditions of Ezhavas towards the close of 19th century. Lt. Ward and Conner provide vital accounts in this regard.¹⁸ Billboards exhibited by the government prohibiting the movements of lower castes in various places caused tremendous tension between various communities in the early decades of 20th century. Government has also issued specific orders during the time of *Murajapam** The orders clearly prevented lower castes from entering Fort area of Trivandrum including

¹⁶ C. Kesavan, 1999. *Jeevitha Samaram* (Life Struggle), Trivandrum, Prabhath Book House, pp.81-82.

¹⁷ C. M. Agur, 1903, Rpt. (1990). *Church History of Travancore*, Madras, S.P.S. Press, p. 51.

¹⁸ Ward and Conner, 1898, Rpt. (1994). *Geographical and Statistical Memoirs of the Survey of Travancore and Cochin State*, Trivandrum, Kerala Gazetteers, p.155.

* *Murajapam*: This religious ceremony started on 5 *Vrischigom* 925 *M. E.* (1749 November) during the reign of Marthanda Varma (1729-1758) in Travancore. He assumed the throne after defeating his enemies including *Ettuveetil Pillamar* and further annexed petty principalities ruled by local Rajas including *Chempakassery Rajyam* (Ambalapuzha). Marthanda Varma accepted the plea of the ruler of Ambalapuzha, who was a Namboodiri that the ceremonies of *Murajapam* and *Ambalapuzha Palpayasam* which was performed by him should be allowed to continue. This was the beginning of *Murajapam*. Grand festival was held at Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, Trivandrum. Performed once in six years, the *Murajapam* included various religious ceremonies. Brahmin priests officiated the ceremonies and participated in large numbers. They were drawn from in and out of Travancore along with elite Namboodiris including *Azvancherry Tamprakkal*. State had maintained elaborate arrangements for the conduct of this ceremony, lasting 56 days and a huge amount of money was spent from the state exchequer to feed and give gifts to the Brahmanas. The increasing expenditure of *Murajapam* year after year invited serious criticism and wrath from various sections of Travancore.

See, Vidwan V. Krishnan Namboodiri, 'Murajapa Mahamaham: Ulbhavavum Chadangukalum' (The Great Murajapam Ceremony Origin and Rites), *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*, 3 February 1936, pp. 29-34.

Sreevarahom, Sreekanteswaram etc and accordingly instructions had been given to Superintendent of Police to implement the order.¹⁹

To the Ezhavas entry to Fort area had already been restricted and during the *Murajapam* it was implemented more rigorously. During this period non-Hindus including Mohammedans were also denied entry in to Fort area. This restriction severely curtailed the freedom of Ezhavas to appeal before the Dewan. In view of the difficulty experienced by Ezhavas the Resident of Travancore wrote a letter to Dewan asking him to initiate necessary steps to facilitate entry of Ezhavas to Fort area.²⁰ The standing orders of Travancore government till 1899 codified and published by M.R. Krishna Rao, *Sheristadar*, Huzur Cutchery (Secretariat) tells the nature of the ordeals experienced by the lower castes.²¹

Hindu *Sastras* and *Puranas* sanctioned these oppressions and the king had to uphold the values enunciated in these *Dharma* concepts. Despite the educational achievements in Travancore, largely due to Christian missionaries, most of the government schools were inaccessible to non-caste Hindus. On every occasion after a hue and cry against discrimination, government issued orders instructing officers concerned to redress the grievances, but they hardly got implemented. This was due to the tacit understanding between government's policy makers and the bureaucracy. Denial of admission in schools resulted in many riots in Travancore.

In southern Travancore, where the Christian missionary activities were strong and consequent revolts of *Shanars* resulted in challenging the very edifice of caste Hindu privileges, the government was forced to abolish slavery

¹⁹ Cover File No. 15724/ 1893, Bundle No. 189 Serial No. 3483, Kerala State Archives, (here after called KSA), Trivandrum.

²⁰ Cover File No. 15902/ 1847, Bundle No. 22 Serial No. 349, KSA, Trivandrum.

²¹ M. R. Krishna Rao, 1889. *Hand Book of Standing Orders of the Travancore Government*, Cochin, Western Star Press, *Passim*.

in Travancore after 1850. Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. considered that the upper cloth agitation had become a symbol of change. The Nairs believed that the missionaries were behind the agitation. Their anxiety about the Nadars' (Shanars) prosperity and antagonism towards them increased following the abolition of slavery in Travancore.²²

Travancore government was always under pressure since the successive British Residents took up the cause of Nadars. When they were denied admission in government schools, they sought permission to run their own schools. Government was forced to issue circulars asking the Superintendent of District School to take adequate steps in this direction.²³ The government's response towards the demands of Nadars must be viewed in the context of the severe jolt suffered by the government earlier. Confronting the upper caste interest can be considered as part of the process of becoming a human being, as far as the oppressed were concerned. The confrontation resulted in establishing new identities. William Connolly considers the new identities as the 'Politics of Becoming'.²⁴

The first generation of Ezhava leadership was highly influenced by the developments in South Travancore. The lessons of riots between Nadars and Nairs and their effect in Travancore considerably benefitted the Ezhava community. This is the reason why the colonial governmentality was differently perceived by the subaltern sections. The consistent and untiring efforts of colonial intervention resulted in ending slavery in Travancore. The conditions of slave castes like Pulayas, Parayas and Vettuvans etc are brilliantly

²² Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., 1979. 'The Breast Cloth Controversy Caste Consciousness and Social Change in South Travancore', in *Essays in the Political Sociology of South India*, New Delhi, Usha Publications, p.156.

²³ Cover File No. 135/ 1865, Bundle No. 38, Serial No. 586, KSA, Trivandrum.

²⁴ William E. Connolly, 1999. *Why I am not a Secularist*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, p.10.

analyzed in the land mark work of K.K. Kusuman and it closely tracks the efforts of colonial administrations.²⁵

Abolition of slavery in Travancore is regarded as an important milestone in the history of modernization and democratization of Travancore society. Slaves remained as slaves, since they were not conscious of their status. In his rereading of slavery K.K. Kusuman argues that the colonial intervention helped the oppressed to become aware of their slave condition and that it had made tremendous impacts on the lives of the slaves.

The space for the activities of Christian missionaries were not artificially created, it was in a way offered to them, on account of the social condition prevailed in Travancore. The SNM largely responsible for the modernization of Kerala society had not emerged in vacuum. It was the activities of Christian missionaries that set the stage for the emergence of a movement like SNDP Yogam. Colonial modernity played a subversive role in Travancore; it not only offered a challenge towards the social system but instilled confidence and provided solace to the oppressed. Travancore always boasted as the model state among all the native states, though the lower castes were oppressed and ghettoized in an unparalleled fashion. The worst thing was that they were denied accessibility to those institutions where their grievances were supposed to be presented. The British residents took up this issue and asked the government to redress their grievance in this regard.²⁶ We have seen the apprehension of local inhabitants of Anjengo, when an idea of transferring the territory in to Travancore was mooted by the British Resident.²⁷

²⁵ K. K. Kusuman, 1973. *Slavery in Travancore*, Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, pp.28-73.

²⁶ Cover Files No 4/1852, Bundle No. 24, Serial No. 392 and No. 1439/1884, Bundle No.101, Serial No. 2282, KSA, Trivandrum.

²⁷ See Foot Note No. 30 in Introduction

Awakening of Ezhavas: Shouldering Responsibility and Changing the Social Equilibrium

The assertion of Ezhavas against the existing social oddities that resulted in changing the whole society can be considered as a great trajectory in the history of Travancore. In the social hierarchy Ezhavas are upper most among the out-caste Hindus. They were known differently in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar as Ezhavas, Chovans and Tiyyas respectively. Within the same region also there were different sections among them known in various names like *Thandars*, *Channars* etc. A prevalent theory was that they migrated from Ceylon, subscribed by major historians.²⁸ The etymological derivative probabilities are Ezhavas from *Eelam* or *Izham* which means independence, *Thiyar* from *Theep* or *Dweep* means island.

But this was strongly refuted by K.R. Narayanan, a prominent community historian and a close associate of T.K. Madhavan. He held the view that Ezhavas are aboriginals of the Dravidian stock in India.²⁹ Kambil Ananthan also tracks the antiquity of Ezhavas in Kerala itself and he emphasizes the commonalities of customs and practices with other communities especially with Nairs.³⁰ While some of the Ezhava leaders like K.R. Narayanan and N.R.

²⁸ (a) V. Nagam Aiya, 1906. *The Travancore State Manual*, Trivandrum, Travancore Government Press, Vol. II, pp.398-402.

(b) Edgar Thurston, 1909. *Caste and Tribes of India*, Madras, Government Press, pp. 291-418.

(c) William Logan, 1951. *Malabar*, Madras, Government Press, Vol.I, p.116.

(d) F.B Evans, 'Malabar' in C.A. Innes (Gnl.ed.), 1951. *Madras District Gazetteers*, Madras, Government Press, pp.124-25.

²⁹ K. R.Narayanan, 'Ezhavar Oru Padanam'(Ezhavas a Study) *Vivekodayam*, *Special Issue*, January 1967, Book No. I, Issue No. I, pp.29-32.

Vivekodayam re-published after a long gap, edited by C. R. Kesavan Vaidyar, the prominent Ezhava leader and industrialist. This *Vivekodayam* is the first issue after C. R. Kesavan Vaidyar assumed editorship, printed at Chandrika Press, Irinjalakkuda,

³⁰ (a) Kambil Ananthan, 1935. *Kerala Charitra Nirupanam Athava Thiyyarude Pauranikathwam* (Review of Kerala History or the Antiquity of Tiyyas), Publisher, P.Achutan (Thalassery), Cannanore, Edward Press, pp.85-97.

(b) _____ 'Tiyyar', *SNDP Yogam Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, SNDP Yogam, Kollam, 1953, [here after called *SNDP GJS*, 1953], pp. 97-100.

Krishnan eulogized the glory of Ezhavas in the past to imagine the community and to mobilize them for the cause of community, a view not endorsed by upper caste journals. *Resika Ranjini* viewed that Ezhava status was very close to Shanars of Tirunelveli district and Billavas of Karnaraka.³¹ But at the same time SNDP Yogam had consistently made efforts to make a unified homogenous community. Within a short period of its inception SNDP yogam officially clarified that, when it referred to community it meant Ezhavas, Chovans and Tiyyas alone.³²

Imagining Community: The Census Operations

In Travancore the successive census reports were used as an effective instrument to imagine the Hindu community as each census report showed increase in Christian population and so it was also used as a signifier to point out the threat of conversion. Despite these implications the population statistics is very important to analyze the policies and attitudes of government, considering the sufferings of the out-caste Hindus.

The following statistics is taken from an important monograph, *Kshetra Pravesana Vadam* (Temple Entry Demand) written by P.K. Narayana Pillai. This monograph was prepared at the instance of T.K.Madhavan, when the movement for temple entry demand of the Ezhavas died out and was reduced to a demand for *Sanchara Swatantryam* (Freedom of Movement). Though this monograph intended to highlight the threat of conversion and consequent erosion in Hindu population, it provides the vital statistics regarding Hindu religion.

³¹ *Resika Renjini* (Mal.), Magazine, 1905, Book No.4, Issue No.10, p.547.

³² *Vivekodayam*, 1907 November-December (1083 *Vrischigom-Dhanu M.E*), Book No. 4, Issue No. 8 & 9, p.5. [The special resolution adopted in the 4th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Municipal High School ground, Kannur on 26-27 *Meenom* 1082 *M.E* (29-30 March 1907). It says that 'the term community implicates Tiyyas, Chovas and Ezhavas only].

The breakup details of the percentage of Hindu population of Ezhavas and Nairs are not given- But it is derived in Table - 1³³

Table-I

Year	Travancore Population	% of Total Population	% of Hindu Population
1875	2308891	—	—
HINDUS	1700317	73.64%	—
NAIRS	4,40,392	19.07%	25.90%
EZHAVAS	3,83,017	16.51%	22.52%
MOHAMMEDANS	1,39,405	6.06%	—
NATIVE CHRISTIANS	4,66,874	20.29%	—
1881	2,40,1158	—	—
HINDUS	1755610	73.12%	—
NAIRS	464239	19.33%	26.44%
EZHAVAS	387176	16.12%	22.05%
MOHAMMEDANS	146909	6.11%	—
CHRISTIANS	498542	20.76%	—

The last census held in the 19th century took place in 1891. Details of the population in Travancore are shown in Table – 2.³⁴

Table-2

Year	Total population	Total % of population	Total % of Hindu population	Difference in Ten Years.
1891	2557736	—	—	—
HINDUS	1871864	73.18	—	—
NAIRS	483725	18.92	25.84	+19486
EZHAVAS	414217	16.20	22.13	+270451
NATIVE CHRISTIANS	526911	20.60	—	+28369
MOHAMMEDANS	158823	6.02	—	+11914

³³ P. K. Narayana Pillai, 1927. *Kshetra Pravesana Vadam Athava Keralachara Nadi Pareeksha* (Temple Entry Claim or the Pulse Examination of the Kerala Custom), Publisher K.G. Parameswaran Pillai, Sree Rama Vilasom Press, Kollam, pp.5-6.

³⁴ TCR, 1891. *op cit.*, pp. 646-647.

Censuses are conducted to facilitate administrative policies and to streamline them. They also provide details of the tendencies of decrease or increase in population or other vital information which the state considered as essential to formulate its own programs. But at the same time they were also used to imagine the Hindus, spread over various castes as one unit in times of crisis. P.K. Narayana Pillai's analysis was the best example as it clearly represented the anxiety of Hindus being reduced to minority, so he pleaded that caste - Hindus should support the demand of Ezhavas for temple entry.

The numerical strength of Ezhava community had not deterred the state from adopting a policy of repression towards them. The specific disadvantages of the community had been elaborately discussed by Dr. Palpu in his seminal work '*Treatment of Tiyyas in Travancore*,' published in 1896. Dr. Palpu, who actively associated in submitting the Malayali Memorial, mainly highlighted the plight of native Travancoreans in the government service. Malayali Memorial (1891) elaborately took statistics from the 1881 census. It says, 'worse than all there is not a single representation of the Tiyya community holding government appointment on Rs 5/--or above a month in the state, though intelligent and educated men are not wanting them; whereas several of their caste men in Malabar have been advanced to some of the highest office of the Uncovenanted Civil Service open to natives in India'.³⁵

The Tiyya advancement in Malabar was due to their uninhibited mingling with the system and the willingness of the English administration to incorporate them taking their qualifications into account. Cyriac K. Pullapilly observes, 'the Tiyya community was the only one that was flexible enough to mingle freely with the English and to take full advantage of all educational and economic opportunities provided to them. The historic estrangement of Tiyyas/

³⁵ Malayali Memorial dated 11.01.1891 to Travancore ruler cited in M. J. Koshy, 1972. *Genesis of Political Consciousness in Kerala*, Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, pp. 83-89.

Ezhavas from the mainstream of caste Hindu society seems to be the main reason for their development'.³⁶

The Tiyya advancement in Malabar was mainly due to colonial patronage, and it also revealed the fact that the more they distanced themselves from the caste Hindu fold the more they achieved. They never bothered about the allegation that they had allied with foreigners and thereby caused damage to Hinduism. They utilized all the available opportunities and achieved progress. The case of Chooriyayi Kanaran (1812-1876) who entered the civil service as a Jailor with Rs 18/- as monthly salary and retired as District Deputy Collector with a salary of Rs 600/- per month exemplifies the Tiyya advancement in Malabar during British rule.³⁷ He assumed the office of District Deputy Collector in 1869 long before SNM started its activities in Travancore.

The achievement of Chooriyoyi Kanaran is significant on many counts. He was elevated to the post of District Deputy Collector decades before Malayali Memorial, which lamented the absence an Ezhava in Travancore government service who drew a salary of Rs 5/- per month. The things were different in Malabar. The first non-European person appointed as the Principal in Government Victoria College, Palaghat was an Ezhava. When the principal initiated disciplinary action against some students who conducted repeated processions inside the college supporting Home Rule Movement, local caste Hindus organized agitation against him.³⁸

³⁶ Cyriac K. Pullapilly, 'The Ezhavas of Kerala and their Historic Struggle for Acceptance in the Hindu Society', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. XL, 1-2, 1976, p. 34.

³⁷ (a) O. Aabu, 'Sreeman Chooriyayi Kanaran' (Mr. Chooriyayi Kanaran), *SNDP GJS*, 1953, pp.245-46.

(b) C. Krishnan, 'Chooriyayi Kanaran Avarkal' (Mr. Chooriyayi Kanaran), *Mitavadi*, Special Issue, 1924, pp. 44-49.

³⁸ *Desabhimani*, 'Victoria Collegile Kuzhappam' (Trouble in Victoria College), 6 October 1917.

The Travancore government in their reply to Malayali Memorialists put the entire blame on Ezhavas.³⁹ Dr. Palpu refuted all claims of the government and graphically sketched the plight of Ezhavas in his memorial submitted to Dewan Sasnkara Soobier (known as first Ezhava Memorial) dated 13 May 1895 from Bangalore.⁴⁰ This historic memorial is the most discussed document in the social history of modern Kerala, which tellingly presented the sad plight of Ezhavas. This memorial assumed the proportion of a 'Document Immortal'. Government did not respond to this and Dr. Palpu sent two reminders, but the government remained unmoved. Then he met the Dewan in person and discussed the matter, got some assurance from him, but nothing materialized. Dr. Palpu submitted another memorial signed by 13176 Ezhavas to the king of Travancore. The issues regarding school admission and appointments in government service were again highlighted in the memorial submitted on 3 September 1896. Finally Dr. Palpu received an official reply on 31 October 1896 explaining the constraints of government to consider the demands of Ezhavas on account of the existing norms and customs based on caste system.⁴¹

Ezhavas Cornered

The condition of Ezhavas remained the same even after many years of the formation of SNDP Yogam. School admission and employment in government service were the two hotly debated issues of the community. Every single opportunity was used to project these issues, either in the floor of assemblies or in the columns of community journals. In one of the most appealing editorial Vivekodeyam squarely wrote.... 'As always, Ezhavas have two grievances still today. Government provides employment opportunities to those who convert and that should be given to Ezhavas even if they remain as

³⁹ Dr. P. Palpu, 1896. *Tiruvitamkotte Ezhavar* (Treatment of Tiyyas in Travancore), in N. K. Damodaran (Compiled & Edited), 1988, Publisher R. Sankaran, Trivandrum, Minerva Printing Works, pp.9-10.

⁴⁰ Dr. P. Palpu, Ezhava Memorial to Dewan of Travancore, Full text cited in M. J. Koshy, *op. cit.*, pp.190-199.

⁴¹ N. K. Damodaran, *op. cit.*, pp.42-53.

Hindus. Secondly their children should be given admissions in government schools without any discrimination'.⁴² Government's apathy towards Ezhavas continued till violent riots broke out between them and others.

In a largely agrarian economy like that of Travancore, caste and its oppressive institutions were ruthlessly effective. Despite growing trade and infrastructure development due to colonial intervention, agrarian relations, based on caste system remained unchanged. It inflicted untold miseries to Ezhavas and their position was close to Pulayas. Describing caste and agrarian hierarchy in traditional Kerala society; Thomas Isaac and Michel Tharakan observed that Ezhavas had only some inferior lease rights and had to work in the garden lands.

The following diagram shows caste and agrarian hierarchy in the traditional Kerala society.⁴³

Priest, rulers and Administrative officials >	<i>Jenmom</i> (Owner Ship) Rights in land >	Brahmins, Rajas & Aristocratic Nairs
Militia in charge of law and order and petty officials >	<i>Kanom</i> (Superior Lease) Rights >	Nairs and Nambiars
Petty producers, traders Artisans & Dry land labour>	<i>Verum Pattom</i> (Inferior Lease) Rights >	Non Aristo Nairs ,Ezhavas Christians & Muslims
Wetland Labour >	Agriculture Labour >	Ezhavas, Pulayas and Cherumas

⁴² *Vivekodayam*, 'Tiruvitamkoor Governmentum Ezhavarum'(Travancore Government and Ezhavas), 30 *Medam* 1080 ME (1905 April), Book No. 2, Issue No.1, pp.1-2.

⁴³ T. M. Thomas Issac and P. K. Michel Tharakan, 1986. *Sree Narayana Movement in Travancore (1888-1939), A Study of Social Basis and Ideological Reproduction*, (Working Paper No. 214), Trivandrum, Centre for Development Studies, p. 5.

Among the 361 big land lords in Travancore who paid above Rs 100/- as land tax, there were 154 Nairs and only 8 Ezhavas⁴⁴ and among them Alumoottil Channar paid more than Rs 500/- as land tax. Despite the lofty claims, the educational status of Ezhavas remained miserably low. The census data regarding the educational status of various communities in 1891 clearly attest the fact that despite the government claims no significant progress has been achieved. The following table shows it clearly.⁴⁵

Table – 3

CASTE		LITERATE >	MALE		LITERATE >	FEMALE
		Proportion of literate to total males in 1891	Proportion of literate to total male in 1875		Proportion of literate to total female in 1891	Proportion of literate to total female in 1875
Brahmin	11925	51.72	50.18	1469	7.15	1.33
Nair	90542	37.47	21.27	16673	6.89	1.19
Ezhava	24996	12.10	3.15	1089	—	0.05
Pulaya	4031	0.39	0.19	630	—	—
Paraya	858	2.35	0.60	91	0.25	—

The literacy rate among the oppressed castes clearly shows the dismal situation, when we compare it in terms of their population accounted in the 1891 census: Brahmin-43595, Nair –483725, Ezhava- 414217, Pulaya-202616, and Paraya- 71786. Here is the caste wise break up of pupils.⁴⁶

Caste/ creed	Boys	Girls	Total
Malayala Brahmins	478	117	595
Tamil Brahmins	4158	1475	5653
Malayala Sudras	42189	16075	58264
Ezhavas	14207	2486	16687
Parayas	1519	317	1836
Pulayas	2236	174	2410
Mohammedans	5079	1152	6231

⁴⁴ P. S. Velayudan, 1978. *SNDP Yogacharitam* (History of SNDP Yogam), Quilon, SNDP Yogam, p.7, ff, 12.

⁴⁵ *Travancore Administration Report* (TAR), 1863-64, Education p.21 and *TAR* 1864-65, p.23.

⁴⁶ *TAR*, 1897-98, Section VII, Instruction, p. 135.

The census of 1901 shows the total population of Ezhavas-491774, Nairs- 561100, Pulayas-206503 Brahmins-53893, Nambudiris-9475 and Mohammedans-190566.⁴⁷ The educational status compared to population remained abysmally low. This was the specific reason why the Ezhava leadership concentrated their attention on this demand. They were grossly marginalized in government service also.

We have seen the unique situation that prevailed in Travancore, nowhere else did exist such a discrimination based on caste. The State has no hesitation to admit the same officially. The unique stature of Travancore regarding caste discrimination was admitted by Dewan V.P. Madhava Rao, while delivering his presidential address in the first session of Sree Moolam Popular Assembly, (SMPA) on 22 October 1904.⁴⁸ Dewan highlighted the exclusive character of Travancore, which was a stumbling block to the advancement of oppressed castes. Dewan said in his speech 'Among the native states in India Travancore holds a unique position. This is the only Hindu state which has not come under Mohammedan domination and which retains unimpaired its ancient Hindu type and character'. He explained at length the history of the state, which submitted to the presiding deity, *Sree Padmanaba* by Marthanda Varma, the king, and since then he became the *Sree Padhmanabha Dasa* (the servant and agent of the deity).⁴⁹ Dewan loudly claimed that Travancore government had adopted western ideas for administrative measures and that under compelling circumstances Travancore did so. But the basic difference was that in Europe, nation states emerged and functioned totally detached from religion, where as in Travancore the entire state was submitted to religion (Hinduism).

⁴⁷ *Travancore Census Report*, 1901.

⁴⁸ 'Proceedings of the 1st session of SMPA', *Travancore Government Gazette*, 8 November, 1904 (23 Thulam 1080 M.E), Vol. 42, Issue No. 45, pp.2-3.

Sree Moolam Popular Assembly (SMPA) has been constituted as per the scheme sanctioned by the ruler of Travancore vide proceedings No. 640, political dated.1st October 1904 (16 Kanni 1080 ME) issued at Camp, Alwaye.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.3. (Presidential address of the Dewan in the first session of SMPA)

In the first session of SMPA, Krishnan Madhavan (Kunju Pillai Chekon) the Ezhava nominated member from the land holders' constituency strongly pleaded for the school admission and government employment for his community. Krishnan Madhavan who belonged to Komelezathu house, Mavelikara, closely related to T.K. Madavan's uncle. He said that as the government had recently excluded the Ezhava community from the list of backward classes, they had a claim to be admitted in all government schools. He further asked to redress the grievances of Ezhavas as they were not admitted in Ayurveda *Patasala* and Sanskrit College.⁵⁰

As Krishnan Madhavan was indisposed, T.K. Madavan spoke on behalf of him in this session and eloquently presented the matter. T.K. Madavan was just 19 years old at that time. When Madhavan's name was called by the Chief Secretary A.J. Viera, an upper caste Brahmin member left his seat, but restrained himself due to official intervention.⁵¹

Another Ezhava nominated member from land holder's constituency, Sankaran Kochu Channar, head of the Alumoottil Channar family who spoke in this session echoed similar views of Krishnan Madhavan and added that local industries should be encouraged. The third Ezhava member who spoke in a similar vein was Kandan Ikkannan from Paravoor.⁵²

The Ezhava representation in government job was appalling. The following table reveals the picture.

⁵⁰ Travancore Government Gazette, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24 (Debates of the First Session of SMPA).

⁵¹ P. K. Madhavan, 1936. *T. K. Madhavante Jeeva Charitram* (Mal.), (Biography of T. K. Madhavan), Vol.I, Trivandrum, M/s. Sarada Book Depot, pp.36-38.

P.S. P. K. Madhavan wrongly mentioned that the first session of SMPA held on 1079 ME (sec. P.36.) But it was held on 1080 ME (1904). See. Foot Note Nos. 48-50. He also wrongly mentioned A. K. Sankara Menon as the Trivandrum Dewan Peischar (p. 38) but he was the Dewan Peischar of Kottayam. There was no Dewan Peischar in Trivandrum but only Deputy Peischar and that was P. Ramakrishna Iyer (List of the officials with their designation is appended in the Government Gazette dated, 8 November 1904).

⁵² Travancore Government Gazette, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

Table - 4

CASTE	Population		English learners		Those who drawn salary Rs10-50 in Govt: service		Those who drawn salary above Rs 50/- in Govt: service	
	1875	1891	1875	1891	1875	1891	1875	1891
Non - Native Brahmins	27700	28100	—	645	220	1035	57	101
Nairs	441000	483770	—	572	410	1620	35	99
Ezhavas	3,83000	414000	—	30	—	—	—	—
Christians (All Denominations)	4,68550	5,26900	—	534	10	95	4	21

In the table the population figures are rounded. Actual figures were Nairs- 440932 (1875), 483725 (1891); Ezhavas 383017 (1875), 414217 (1891); Christians- 466874 (1875) 526911 (1891). Majority of the 30 Ezhavas who learned English, were from Christian mission schools.⁵³

It is indeed caste consideration alone that was responsible for this marginalization of Ezhavas from getting school admission and government jobs. Even some legislation which nominally favoured the Ezhavas was not implemented by the bureaucracy. When it was complained, the government replied that if their demands were met it would create further tensions. In social life Ezhavas experienced strong presence of the factors that made their social mobility impossible. Almost all spheres of public life remained inaccessible to them. They had to wage relentless agitation for free physical movement.

⁵³ P. S. Velayudan, *op.cit.*, p. 24, ff 31.

Contextualizing Colonial Modernity

The experience of colonial modernity was differently felt by different castes in India. The national political leadership that waged struggles against the British Raj, felt that the modernity project had its own positive impacts. It roused the national political consciousness of the people and helped to mobilize them to struggle against British rule. This paradigm cannot be applied to Kerala, particularly to the Travancore context, so the phenomena of colonial modernity should be contextualized.

Creation of public sphere is directly connected with modernity project of Raj, though it needed a secular space to function. As the public sphere enlarged, the functional value of caste diminished, though not disappeared. The first generation of nationalist leadership was the full beneficiaries of this situation. The Bengali *Bhadraloks*, (elites) from which the early nationalist leadership emerged can be cited as the best example. On the other hand in Travancore the enlargement of public sphere was resisted by the caste Hindus in various ways. The concept of public sphere is theoretically developed by renowned German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who observed that the public sphere is the sphere in which political life is openly discussed by citizens.⁵⁴ Here in Travancore caste lay at the centre of real politics.

Enlargement of public sphere thanks to colonial modernity facilitated both vertical and horizontal mobility of the oppressed castes. A. Aiyappan terms it as 'reduction of social distance'. He adds that in the newly developing towns, in trains and steam boats, in schools, colleges and in offices, it was physically impossible to observe 'contact taboos'.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 1984. *Structure of Transformation of Public Sphere*, Cambridge, ITC, Cambridge, p.29.

⁵⁵ A. Aiyappan, 1965. *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village*, New Delhi, Asia Publishing House, p.132.

The missionary activities in Travancore effected fundamental restructuring of the traditional society. London Mission Society missionaries rendered commendable service in the field of education and established first English schools, where the oppressed castes were freely admitted. The contribution of the Christian missionaries in the field of education was significant and V. Nagam Aiya who acted as the census commissioner of Travancore in 1891 admitted it.⁵⁶

The British Resident Col. Maculay granted permission to W.T. Ringletaub, the head of the LMS to construct a church at Myladi (peacock dancing) near Nagercoil in 1806. This proved as a great boost to the activities of LMS in South Travancore, which in turn considerably benefited the oppressed castes. Earlier a request for constructing a church was turned down by the then Dewan, Veluthampi Dalawa.⁵⁷

During Munroe's time (1810-1819) both as Resident and Dewan, far reaching administrative reforms were introduced in Travancore. Munroe reported to Madras government that 'No description can produce an adequate impression of the tyranny, corruption and abuses' prevailed in Travancore, where for the oppressed and exploited people 'complaint was useless, redress hopeless'. Munroe drastically curtailed the judicial powers of local officers and instituted Zillah Court and Court of Appeal and cut down the expenditure on religion.⁵⁸

His take over of 378 odd temples in Travancore resulted in liquidating the parallel power centres. Major temples of those days exercised enormous administrative powers. Temple authorities could even summon a ruler and

⁵⁶ Travancore Census Report 1891, *op.cit.*, pp. 471-475.

⁵⁷ C. M. Agur, *op.cit.*, p.10.

⁵⁸ Dick Kooiman, 1989. *Conversion and Social Equality in India*, Amsterdam, Free University Press, pp. 23-24, ff 19-25.

inflict punishment. Major temples were considered as temple kingdoms. This action of Munroe caused a severe blow to the feudal and archaic system.*

But the intention of Munroe has been viewed as a triumph of imperialism and an unjustifiable intrusion into the affairs of a sovereign native state.⁵⁹ But how the action of Munroe affected the experiences of various sections of the population socially was not seen in a proper perspective.

It is necessary to examine how colonial modernity helped in enlarging the public sphere, the life blood of a civil society. It provided new secular and modern spaces within the social sphere already existed. In the newly created spaces caste and its institutions found it difficult to operate. In this direction the infrastructural development brought by the modernity project was vital and proved to be a decisive leap forward. Though the same were designed to facilitate colonial exploitation, it brought mobility to oppressed castes. They were unable to escape from exploitation and oppression due to lack of transport facilities. There was no Public Works Department in Travancore till 1863. A series of road construction was initiated during the time of Dewan Madhava Rao, connecting important centres with the capital. P.S. Velayudhan rightly observed that as a result 'those who tied in their respective villages were able to contact with distant places'.⁶⁰ Outside intervention in Kerala contributed much in the development of infrastructural facilities. It was Tipu Sultan for the first time took important steps in constructing many roads in Malabar during his campaign.⁶¹

* For Details of the take over of Temples see R. N. Yesudas, 1975. *Col: John Munroe in Travancore*, Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, and T. P. Sankaran Kutty Nair, *Col: John Munroe, the Resident Dewan of Travancore* (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis), 2003, Thiruvananthapuram, University of Kerala.

⁵⁹ The Regional Records Survey Committee, 1970. *The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala, Vol. I*, Trivandrum, pp. 36-43. (See Chapter IV Triumph of Imperialism)

⁶⁰ P. S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.*, pp. 11 & 14-15.

⁶¹ P. K. Balakrishnan, 1989. *Tipu Sultan* (Mal), Kozhikode, Al Huda Book Stall, pp. 193-208.

The question of economic exploitation and modernity aspects of the colonial rule were differently discussed. Bill Warren is of the view that it was the imperialist exploitation and modernity aspects of the colonial rule facilitated in freeing the labour, tied in the hinges of pre-modern capitalist economic system. Considering the plantation and industrial sector Bill Warren observed that the employment opportunity in these areas had actually liberated the labour force during the colonial time. He also held the view that if the exploitation of the imperialism had been deeper, the volume and intensity of the liberation of the labour force would have been more effective.⁶² Warren assumed that the lack of progress was solely due to its internal structures. Opposite views are also galore. Imperialism is viewed as the deterrent force in the development of the third world. This position gained much currency in the context of contemporary globalization impasse. Analyzing both Prabhath Patnaik says 'the problem with both these approaches is that they one-sidedly emphasize the 'external' or 'the internal' constraints; the dialectical link between the two is completely lost sight of'.⁶³ Despite this criticism the theoretical position of Bill Warren seems quite tenable considering the conditions of the oppressed castes in Travancore

Even the most conservative outlook cannot but acknowledge the far reaching effects of colonial domination. R. Narayana Panickar elaborately discusses the positive aspects of English domination and its impacts in Travancore.⁶⁴ The most important among the impacts of colonial intervention was that it had caused the emergence of assertions of the non-caste Hindus. Moreover the Hindu religion itself underwent rigorous changes '... reformers took up other causes which the newly gained intellectual and social perspectives demanded: the anti – rational bases of many religious rituals; unjustifiable caste restrictions on inter dinning, diet and overseas travel; malpractices in the

⁶² Bill Warren, 1980. *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*, London, Verso, *Passim*.

⁶³ Prabhat Patnaik, 1997. 'Lenin and Imperialism' in *Whatever Happened to Imperialism and Other Essays*, Chennai, Tulika, p. 98.

⁶⁴ R. Narayana Panickar, 1933. *Thiruvitamkoor Charitram* (History of Travancore), Trivandrum, Vallivilasom Publishing House, pp. 590-91.

management of temples and religiously sanctioned prostitution, the degrading treatment of low castes and untouchables and infanticide'.⁶⁵

Coming of Print: Subverting Hierarchy

Benedict Anderson in his path breaking study on nation and nationalism held the view that nations were not the determinate products of given sociological condition such as language, race or religion; they had been in Europe and everywhere else in the world imagined into existence. The imagined community assumes its central shape, which he calls, Print Capitalism, provides new institutional space for the development of modern 'national' language.⁶⁶ On the other hand in Travancore print had played an opposite role, it deimagined the factors thought to be favourable for the formation of nation. It imagined the communities to assert them on caste lines, a process considered contradictory to the making of nation. Print is the struggle of remembrance against forgetfulness. It is the testimonial, which provides memories of one's own past and help to reconstruct one's own identity. 'It is a process of mobilizing their sentiments, fixing their memories and guiding their habits'.⁶⁷

In Travancore, to the oppressed castes, coming of print was of enormous help, since they suffered a bitter past. Print journalism had played a very different role in Travancore as compared to other parts. Each and every journal vowed to protect the interest of their respective castes and also aimed at the process of community formation. These journals in general attacked the obsolete practices, proved detrimental to homogenize the community. Very few journals owned by caste Hindus still propagated orthodox viewpoints. They cautioned the danger of westernization of society and reminded their fellow

⁶⁵ Charles H. Heimsath, 1964. *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Benedict Anderson, 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983, pp. 17-49.

⁶⁷ Roger Chartier, 1987. *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 233.

women / men that the collapse of caste system would lead to destruction of the existing social set up.

Journals elaborately propagated ideas which helped in promoting the cause of their castes. Any thing accepted without debate suffered a severe jolt thanks to print culture in Travancore. Rigorous debates were pursued on all issues and effected far reaching changes.

In Travancore as elsewhere in Kerala the emergence of print culture was associated with Christian Missionaries. In most of the important towns in Kerala printing presses were established in the early 19th century and many journals were published from here.⁶⁸ By the turn of the 20th century most of the castes owned more than one organ. They debated caste issues, social customs and rituals and least attention was paid to issues regarding nation and nationalism, which was worth noting. The print became an integral part of modernization and it reflected the ability of self-representation of the oppressed. M.S.S Pndiyan analyses these trends and impacts regarding print. 'The emergence of print culture and a reading public, new forms of knowledge spawned by the Orientalist scholarship, the circulation of books published in the west, modern forms of education and legal system, and a novel public sphere wherein new modes of representation were encouraged, created some of these new institutional practices'.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ N. Sam, 1988. *Keralathile Samoothika Navothanavum Sahityavum* (Social Renaissance and Literature in Kerala), Kottayam, National Book Stall, p, 165. Also see M. Achuthan, 2003. *Swathantrya Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum* (Freedom Struggle and Malayalam Literature), Thrissur, Kerala Sahitya Akademy, p, 64.

See some of the earliest ventures: *C. M. S. Press*, Kottayam (1821), *Litho Press*, Tellicherry (1845), *Vidyavilasom Press*, Calicut (1801), *Kerala Mithram Press*, Cochin (1881), *Vidya Ratna Prabha Press*, Kayamkulam (1881), *Kerala Kalpadrumam Press*, Thrissur (1880). The Basel Mission of Telicherry, headed by Dr. Herman Gundert published the first paper *Rajyasamacharam* in Malayalam (June 1847)

⁶⁹ M. S. S. Pandiyan, 2007. *Brahmin and Non Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, p. 18.

In Travancore it was in Kottayam, the Church Mission Society (CMS) published the first journal *Jnana Nikshepam* (Deposit of Wisdom). In 1863, the Malayalam newspaper *Paschima Tharakam* and its English version *Western Star* started from Kochi, by Kurian Writer. *Western Star's* office was subsequently shifted to Trivandrum.⁷⁰

As intervention of missionaries increased, print journalism mushroomed in Travancore. To name a few important journals; *Sandistavaadi*, Kottayam (1876), *Travancore Abhimani*, Nagercoil (1876) *Kerala Chandrika*, Trivandrum (1879) *Vidya Vilasini*, Trivandrum (1881), *Malayali*, Trivandrum (1886), *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini*, Trivandrum (1886) *Malayala Mitram*, Kottayam (1876) The most prominent among them were *Nasrani Deepika*, sponsored by the Syrian Catholics, printed in Mannanam St. Joseph Press (15 April 1887) and *Malayalam Manorama*, Kottayam (1890). Some of the journals were known in their caste name; *Unni Namboothiri*, *Nair*, *Suriyani Malankara Sabha Taraka* and *Yogakshemam*.⁷¹

Sujanandini was the first Ezhava journal, published from Parur by Kesavan Asan. It was started in the year 1892 as a weekly and continued up to 1897 in its first spell. It was re-started again in the year 1903 and continued up to early 1906. The press was burned down by Nair chauvinists during the terrible Nair - Ezhava riot in Travancore during 1905-06. Ezhava grievances were put in black and white for the first time in *Sujanandini*. Educational backwardness and under representation of Ezhavas in government jobs were the

⁷⁰ K.C. Mammen Mappilai, 'Malayalathile Varthamanapathrangal Oru Samanya Prathyavalokanam (Newspapers of Malayalam a General Review)', *SNDP GJS*, 1953, pp. 73-76 & 80.

⁷¹ For details of Print Journalism: See

S. Achuta Warriar, 2003. *Kerala Samskaram* (Mal.), Tvm, Kerala Bhasha Institute, pp. 174-75. -- G. Priyadarsanan, 1999. *Kerala Pathra Pravartanam Suvarnaadyayangal* (Mal.), Kottayam, Current Books, p.36. -- P.Bhaskaranunni, 1998. *Pathonpathom Nootandile Keralam* (Mal.), Thrissur, Kerala Sahitya Akadamy, pp.1121-1123. P.K.Parameswaran Nair, 1992. *Malayala Pathrapravarthanathile Prarambha Ghattangal* (Mal.), Kochi, Kerala Times, p.268.—Moorkathu Kunjappa, 1973. *Malayala Manorama Samskarika Tharangini* (Mal.), Kottayam, Malayala Manorama Publishing House, p. 107.

chief concerns of the journal. In its issue on 3 *Dhanu* 1068 *M. E* (December 1892) *Sujanandini* carried an important editorial, *Whether Discrimination be Allowed in Education Department*⁷²

Even *Vivekodayam* used to reproduce the articles and editorials appeared in *Sujanandini*. On one occasion it reproduced the editorial *Travancore Government and Ezhavas*. It was keen to expose the false propaganda being spread against Ezhava community. An editorial narrating an incident occurred at a school in Chengannoor is an example. The British Resident in his visit to the school asked the authorities why there was no Ezhava student there and he was told that it was because the Ezhavas were not interested in sending their children to schools.⁷³ *Sujanandini* made a frontal attack on this blatant lie conveyed to the British Resident.

Taking cue from *Sujanandini* the same subject was later dealt in many Ezhava journals like *Vivekodayam*, *Mitavadi*, *Kerala kaumudi*, *Desabhimani* and *Sahodaran*. C.V. Kunjuraman regularly contributed in *Sujanandini* and he acted as the sub editor of the journal. In 1911 C.V. Kunjuraman started *Kerala Kaumudi* and it continued for few years and restarted in 1920. When *Sujanandini* and *Kerala Kaumudi* were closed down, the famous weekly newspaper edited by T. K. Madhavan filled the vacuum. *Desabhimani* started in April 1915.

Apart from *Vivekodayam* and *Desabhimani* there were numerous other journals. *Mitavadi* and *Sahodaran* were the most important Ezhava journals in

⁷² P. K. Damodoran, 'Parur Kesavan Asan', *SNDP GJS*, 1953, pp. 151-152 & 158.

⁷³ *Sujanandini*, 'Tiruvitamkur Governmentum Ezhavarum' (Travancore Government and Ezhavas), cited in *Vivekodayam*, 32 *Mithunam* 1080 *ME* (1905 July–August). The publication date of the original article appeared in *Sujanandini* had not mentioned in *Vivekodayam*: probably in early 1905.

Malabar and Cochin respectively. *Mitavadi** edited by C. Krishnan stands apart from other Ezhava journals since it consistently problematised Hindu religion and the concept of nation. *Mitavadi* diligently campaigned against Nationalism and its agenda and exposed its double standard. When *Mathrubhoomi* was started in 1923 from Calicut by K.P. Kesava Menon, the only challenge it encountered was from *Mitavadi*. Though *Mitavadi* was published from Calicut, it was very popular in Cochin and Travancore.

Sahodaran edited by K. Ayyappan, published from Palliport. Eranakulam, started in September 1917. It relentlessly campaigned against the caste and its oppressive institutions. The social revolution he inaugurated through inter-dinning (*Mishra Bhojanam*) in May 1917 was like bombing the headquarters of caste. His mission was later spearheaded through his journal.

The social content of journalism in Travancore was mainly determined by attempts to protect the caste interests. Each and every journal tried their best to imagine their respective communities, brought the attention of the concerned to the grievances of their communities. This inference is made not disregarding the attention paid by the journals to literature and other specific issues. On the other hand these journals including literary ones which enjoyed popular base invariably represented the interest of their respective castes. In the circumstance it was natural to leave aside those issues of nation and nationalism.

**Mitavadi*- First it was started from Thalassary in October 1907, edited by Moorkothu Kumaran, owned by T. Sivasankaran. *Veena Poovu* (The Fallen Flower), Kumaran Asan's much acclaimed contribution to Malayalam literature was first published in *Mitavadi* in 1907. The year 2007 marked grand celebration all over Kerala on the centenary of the publication of the poem. C. Krishnan purchased *Mitavadi* and it was shifted to Calicut and assumed the charge of the editor in August 1913. From 1913 to 1920 December it was a monthly. From January 1921 it became a weekly and continued till 1930. From 5 January 1931 it became a daily newspaper but after 4 months became a weekly again. During 1925-1928 four annual special issues were published.

The Ezhava Assertions: Transformation through Riots

This part chiefly discusses the forms of assertions of Ezhavas till the advent of T.K. Madhavan. The chief forms of assertion were mediated through riots, between Ezhavas and upper castes, especially with Nairs. To capture the rights, denied to them for centuries, Ezhavas had to wage a relentless struggle. In Travancore the form of struggle was social riots. Social change through incessant riots made Travancore different from other parts of the Indian subcontinent.

The entire state machinery, its laws and social relations, existed to strengthen the caste system. The emergence of SNM subversively restructured the base and super structure of caste system. It gave birth to *Sahodara* movement, atheistic movement and other independent community movements. M.K. Kumaran considers that such a social revolution witnessed in Travancore was unparalleled in the history of India.⁷⁴

The formation of SNDP Yogam is considered as the historic moment of Ezhavas. Prior to the formation of SNDP Yogam, Nararayana Guru consecrated Shiva idol at Aruvippuram (1888), which deconstructed the history of prolonged social inequity and caste Hindu domination in the religious sphere. J. Reghu terms it as a 'context smashing event'.⁷⁵ The efforts of Dr. Palpu who organised Ezhava Mahajana Sabha in 1896 and Aruvippuram Kshetra Yogam *Vavutt Yogam* or 'mouth feeding' organization, finally led to the formation of SNDP Yogam on 15 May 1903. Its first session was held at Aruvippuram and the General Secretary, Kumaran Asan presented the report which vividly

⁷⁴ M. K. Kumaran, 'Introduction' in G.Priyadarsanan (ed.), 1982. *Kumaran Asante Praja Sabha Prasangal* (Speeches of Kumaran Asan in SMPA), Kottayam, National Book Stall, pp, XV- XVI.

⁷⁵ J. Reghu, 'Kshetra Nirmana Prasthanathinte Prati Dharmikata'(Counter Ethics of Temple Construction Movement), *Madhyamam Weekly*, 13 March 2004, p. 43.

elaborated the history of the formation of Yogam and the ensuing programme of the organisation in the coming years.⁷⁶

T.K. Madhavan's paternal family (Alumoottil Channars) extended active support to SNDP Yogam since its formation. By virtue of their wealth Alumoottil Channars lavishly donated money to SNDP Yogam and enlisted many members to the organization. SNDP Yogam itself described Karthikapally, Karunagapally and Mavelikkara taluks in Travancore taken together as the heart of SNM,⁷⁷ on account of the influence of Alumoottil Channars who belonged to Karthikapally taluk. In return SNDP Yogam always showed tremendous obligation to Alumoottil family. Sometimes, it held annual sessions in the vicinity of Alumoottil family so as to facilitate the leaders of the SNDP Yogam to take part in settling the family feuds.

SNDP Yogam and its organised work instilled new confidence and strength to Ezhavas in various ways to overcome their subjugation. The history of the assertion of Ezhavas in Travancore initially related with the issue of their freedom of movement. The upper castes on other hand were determined to challenge any attempt to unsettle this situation and they got full official support, though not directly. But this challenge was physically faced by the Ezhavas as shown in the incessant caste riots between Ezhavas and Nairs. The history of Travancore progressed through such riots.

The riots were the first forms of Ezhava assertions. The life and times of Arattapuzha Velayudha Panicker (1825 – 1874) tellingly attests to this fact. He dedicated his life for the cause of the upliftment of his community. He belonged to a wealthy Ezhava family in Arattapuzha, Karthikapally taluk in

⁷⁶ *Vivekodayam*, May 1904 (31 Medom 1079 M.E) Book No. 1, Issue No.1, pp. 14-22 and T.K. Madhavan, 1929. *Dr. Palpu; Jeevacharithram* (Biography of Dr. Palpu), Quilon, Desabhimani. [Fully revised and enlarged by Pallipat Kunju Krishnan, 1969. Mavelikkara, Loyal Press, pp. 184-207.]

⁷⁷ *Vivekodayam*, November 1904 (*Vrischigom* 1080 M.E), Book No.1, Issue No.4, p. 79.

central Travancore. He himself consecrated a *Shiva* idol and established an Ezhava temple at Edakkatt in the year 1854, two years before Narayana Guru's birth. He and his band physically resisted the violence of upper caste and asked Ezhavas to dress and move as they liked. Caste Hindus unleashed violence and attacked their womenfolk, who covered their bosoms and wore nose studs. The new found enthusiasm of Ezhavas invited the wrath of upper castes and they unleashed a reign of terror in these areas, but violence was befittingly met with. He also encouraged inter-dining and other radical measures, thought to be impossible at that time. He was treacherously killed by caste Hindus.⁷⁸

The method adopted by Velayudha Panicker involves certain importance. At the outset he effectively challenged the impossibility; certain situation can be changed only through violence. The places where violence was met with counter violence; the oppressed were more organized and established their rights. The most organized, spirited and asserted sections of the Ezhavas belong to these areas.

In the history of Ezhava community, the session of SNDP Yogam held at Quilon on 7 - 8 January 1905 is considered as a land mark event. Immediately after the conclusion of the session widespread riots between Ezhavas and Nairs broke out in many places in Travancore. The industrial exhibition organized in connection with this session was first of its kind in the history of any community event. C.V. Kunjuraman and M. Govindan were the exhibition committee Secretaries and Dr. Palpu was the President.⁷⁹ The session was a grand success, local and English newspapers reported the event in detail,⁸⁰ Dr. Palpu presided over this session and T.F. Bourdillion, Forest Conservator of

⁷⁸ P. O. Kunju Panickar, 'Arattapuzha Valeyudha Panickar', *SNDP GJS*, 1953, pp. 231-333 and M. Sathya Prakasam, 'Arattapuzha Valayudha Panickar Oru Anusmaranam' (Arattapuzha Velayudha Panickar A Remniscence), *Vivekodayam* (T. K Madhavan Birth Centenary Issue), Aug-Oct 1985, Book No. 19, Issue No. 8-10, pp. 97-102.

⁷⁹ *Vivekodayam*, November 1904 (30 Thulam 1080 M.E), Book No. 1, Issue No.3, pp. 78-82.

⁸⁰ *Madras Mail*, 11 January 1905, National News Paper Records, Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai. (Hereafter called NNPR, TNA)

Travancore, inaugurated the industrial exhibition. This session elected Sankaran Kochu Kunju Channar of Alumoottil family as the Vice President of the SNDP Yogam. Muloor. S Padmanabha Panicker, the Ezhava leader and humour poet who met T.K. Madhavan at the meeting observed in him the unique potentials to be a great leader of the community in future.⁸¹

Widespread riots broke out immediately after the conclusion of this session. What made an industrial exhibition and conduct of an ordinary session of a caste organization so provocative? The subversive and revolutionary character of the event was that it devastated the structure of a context. The conduct of industrial exhibition was the result of Dr. Palpu's far sighted vision. The success of the meeting and exhibition provoked caste Hindus especially the Nair community in Travancore who were the immediate oppressors of Ezhavas. The successful conclusion of the session instilled confidence among the Ezhavas. Attempts were made by them to enter public places, walkways and roads in decent dress, where they were denied permission an account of being Ezhavas.

Hardly two weeks after the session, the first riot occurred on 22 January 1905 at Evoor. First hand information was available in *Vivekodayam* which furnished reason behind the riot. It observed that the riots had nothing to do with the entry of Ezhavas into temples as alleged by the upper castes. Ezhavas tried to get admission in schools and clothed decently which infuriated the Nairs. '---- The riot which began at Evoor temple and Harippad are now spreading into other parts. Newspapers mostly owned by Nairs alleged that Ezhavas forcefully entered the temple premises and these are absolutely false stories. The real reason is the jealousy of some Nairs towards Ezhavas who after their concerted effort achieved some gains'. It asked Ezhavas to maintain restraint and also appealed the government to take necessary administrative

⁸¹ P. K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, Vol.1, pp. 39-40.

steps to contain the revolt. Local officials mostly belonging to Nair community are highly partisan in conduct and this helped in spreading the riot.⁸²

Government records endorsed *Vivekodayam*'s apprehension. At Harippad, Ezhava boys who were returning from school were assaulted by some Nairs. The Superintendent of police and acting District Magistrate, Quilon, visited the spot and reported that the assaults were terrifying in nature and asked the government to post a Christian police inspector to avoid further trouble in that area. On 20 February 1905 serious disturbances were reported in Karunagapally and Karthikapally, all ended in blood shed.⁸³ Similar incidents were reported from many other places also.

The clashes between Nairs and Ezhavas also revealed an interesting fact that in most places where riots occurred, the Ezhavas enjoyed both numerical majority and in some places slight economic edge over Nairs. Despite this advantage Ezhavas were subdued but they vowed not to submit to intimidation.

T.K. Madhavan's first public activity was to get admission for the Ezhava boys in Harippad English School, at that time he himself was a fourth forum student at Maharajas school, Trivandrum. The upper castes of this area resisted the move of Ezhavas. His request to the school headmaster was turned down and finally with the help of the school Inspector Raja Raja Varma he succeeded in his effort. This caused the Nair – Ezhava riots in Harippad, part of the infamous Nair- Ezhava riot of 1080 M.E (1905), widely known as *Enpatham Andathe Lahala* (Riot of the Year 1080 M.E)⁸⁴

Vivekodayam carried a detailed report of the nature of assault inflicted on Ezhavas during the riot.

⁸² Editorial Note – [No.4.], 'Nair Ezhava Lahala' (Nair Ezhava Riots), *Vivekodayam*, February 1905 (*Makaram 1080 M.E*), Book No. 1, Issue No 5, p. 91.

⁸³ *Judicial File No 115/1905*, KSA, Trivandrum.

⁸⁴ P. K Madhavan, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 40-41.

Since the publication of report regarding the riots in the last issue, it continued unabated. Apart from posing severe obstruction to freedom of passage of Ezhavas, they were stabbed and their houses attacked: Looting and arson followed. Ezhava temples and idols were either vandalized or destroyed. Ezhava women were publicly humiliated. Nairs caused damage to Ezhava properties and their crops. People are now abandoning their villages after leaving their properties high and dry and taking shelter in safer places. Despite loyal or indignant petitions to government, it is not contemplating any appropriate action, further worsening the situation.⁸⁵

The assaults on Ezhavas in these riots were unprecedented. M.S.A. Rao wrote that the Ezhavas gained self confidence and began to assert their independence. In January 1905, in a temple festival in a village near Quilon, the Ezhava women dressed liked Nair women and participated in the procession. Enraged by this act the Nairs attacked Ezhava women and stripped them to waist (Madras Mail 21 February 1905). Violence continued and in March *Yogam* conducted an emergency meeting, Kumaran Asan sent the resolution to the government, appealing for redress and protection, but assault on Ezhavas continued.⁸⁶

It was in these riots, the *Kerala Bhooshonam* press which published *Sujanandini* was burned down by the Nairs in March 1905. Various sources accounted this incident.⁸⁷ Kumaran Asan deplored the incident in a poem 'though lumpens injured and torched the paper, never surrender before vandalism but resist till death'.⁸⁸ Sankaran Kochu Kunju Channar, the Vice

⁸⁵ *Vivekodayam*, 'Nair-Ezhava Lahala' (Nair-Ezhava Riot), 30 *Meenom* 1080 M.E (April 1905), Book No. 1, Issue No. 6, p. 116.

⁸⁶ M. S. A. Rao, 1979. *Social Movements and Social Transformation*, Madras, Macmillan, pp. 49-50.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50. & P. K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 41. Also see *Vivekodayam*, Book No.1, Issue No. 6, p. 130, & *SNDP, GJS*, p. 152.

⁸⁸ Paravoor P.K Damodharan, 'Paravoor Kesavan Asasn', *SNDP, GJS*, p.152.

President of SNDP Yogam sent the first petition to government. Robin Jeffrey vividly gives accounts of the disturbances.⁸⁹

The riots terribly changed the situation, existed for a long time. As the riots spiraled Ezhavas retaliated strongly. They paid a heavy price for it, subjected to severe assault for not observing the 'required' polluting distances. In one such incident a Nair stabbed an Ezhava to death.⁹⁰ Some of the so called progressive caste Hindu journals, though condemned the riots between Sudras (Nairs) and Ezhavas, appealed to the concerned to uphold the existing customs (*Achara Maryada*) to avoid such bloodshed.⁹¹ The message was very clear. Ezhavas should not violate the custom. The Ezhavas never started the troubles, the upper castes instigated it and assaulted Ezhavas and the latter reacted in all possible ways.

During this period Ezhavas sporting decent clothes with umbrellas, infuriated the Nairs. C. Kesavan says unfolding umbrellas was a salient feature of the riot. Unfolding an umbrella was regarded as a status symbol. There were riots occurred on account of unfolding umbrellas.⁹² Riots spread from Karthikapally to Quilon and it continued in rural areas for a long time. In Ala, a village in Chengannoor Taluk riots between Nairs and Ezhavas continued for months. Here also the new found assertions of Ezhavas aggrieved the Nairs. Due to these riots Ezhavas had to flee the place.

⁸⁹ Robin Jeffrey, 1994. *The Decline of Nair Dominance*, New Delhi, Manohar, pp.207-11. P.S. - Sankaran kochu Kunju Channar, the head of Alumoottil Channar family was elected as the Vice President of SNDP Yogam twice, i.e. in 1905 and in 1908 and was one among the twenty four members of the SNDP Yogam Director's Board, the apex policy making body of the organization.

⁹⁰ *Nazrani Deepika*, 3 October 1906.

⁹¹ *Vidyabhivardhini*, 'Jaati Vyatyasam' (Caste Difference), 8 Feb 1905, in P. Bhaskaranunni, 2005. *Keralam Irupatham Nootandinte Arambhathil* (Kerala at the Beginning of 20th Century), Thrissur, Sahitya Akademy, p. 270.

⁹² C. Kesavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-134.

Conversion: New Vistas of Liberation, Challenge and Prospects

Riots played a significant role in changing the social equilibrium, as it changed the context in a subversive fashion. Within Hinduism Ezhavas had to struggle very hard to attain self respect despite the positive aspects of riots. The other option was to leave Hinduism to attain social liberation and a sizeable number thought in this direction. The phenomenon of conversion has been thus inextricably linked with the history of assertions of Ezhavas throughout.

Within the Narayana movement a section of leaders stood in favour of conversion but they remained marginalized. The nucleus of the Sree Narayana movement always remained against conversion. Though Narayana Guru himself accommodated leaders like C. Krishnan and Sahodaran Ayyappan, he never concretely spoke in favour of conversion. The streams represented by Sahodaran Ayyappan and C. Krishnan remained in periphery, though they were put into responsible position and regarded in high esteem. 'It was mainly due to the efforts of Swamy (Narayana Guru) that the conversion of Ezhavas to Christianity came to a halt and many reconverted'.⁹³

Narayana movement in its earlier phase critiqued the national movement and nationalist programs but its approach to Hinduism was different. It seems that the movement failed to understand the umbilical cord relation between Indian nationality and Hinduism. C. Krishnan was one of the few who realized this subtle relation. Rarichan Mooppan, the prominent first generation Ezhava leader from Malabar who belonged to *Kallingal Madom* the wealthiest in Malabar also never felt the need of Hinduism to attain liberation. But the case was different with T.K. Madhavan. He strongly represented the stream which opposed conversion and favoured freedom of Ezhavas within Hinduism. The

⁹³ T. K. Velupillai, 1940. *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. IV, Trivandrum, Govt: Press, p. 655.

surges of conversion among Ezhavas are discussed in this study in different stages.

Social inequities and oppression of the Ezhavas and the question of conversion were interrelated. Whenever Ezhavas aired their grievances, there involved conversion. T.K. Madhavan from the very beginning of his public life took a strong position against conversion. His entry into the movement became eventful on many counts and marked the beginning of directional changes.

Perceptions of T. K. Madhavan and the Travails of Ezhavas

T.K. Madhavan belongs to the most prominent and powerful Ezhava family of Travancore. His paternal and maternal families enjoyed prestige and power. They were very closely associated with SNDP Yogam, right from its inception. They were prominent Abkari Contractors (*Kalal Kuthaka*) and landed gentries and members of these families were nominated to SMPA. From his early childhood T.K. Madhavan was deeply influenced by his family surroundings, rooted in strong Hindu customs. This impacted a different influence in Madhavan distinct from that of other leaders of his time.

Despite the power and prestige, his family also suffered the brunt of caste oppression. He vividly describes his boyhood experience during his early school days. He attended a *Kudipallikkudam* (Elementary Country School) run by a Nair teacher. Students were seated according to their castes. Even in punishing students caste discrimination had been observed. The teacher never touched the lower caste students, instead he threw the stick as far as possible to inflict the blow and this was called *Erinjadi* (Blow by throw). As a boy this discrimination made lasting wounds in his mind.⁹⁴ On his way to school Madhavan freely moved with his upper caste classmates but he had to keep the

⁹⁴ P. K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-11.

distance whenever he came across an upper caste person. He realized the fact that the wealth has nothing to do with social acceptance.

Similar was the experience of C. Krishnan during his school days, which prompted him to write a letter to the editor of a paper saying that he wanted to change his name as George Kutty. (This letter was published later in *Kerala Sanchari* in 1 August 1900) He felt humiliated when he had to keep the polluting distance to upper caste persons who were far below in economic status.⁹⁵

Being outcastes Ezhava community was denied basic human rights like *Sanchara Swathantryam* (freedom of movement). They were denied access to walkways and public roads running round the temples. T.K. Madhavan very often suffered on this count also. From Haripad to Mavelikkara he had to take a circuitous route on account of proximity of caste Hindu temples. This prompted Madhavan to launch pioneering agitations for *Sanchara Swatantryam*. Madhavan was determined to attain the required status of Ezhavas, while they remained in Hinduism, as he experienced humiliation despite his family status.

The kind of humiliation and oppression suffered by Ezhavas everywhere in Travancore was appalling. The official records provide such accounts. The petition submitted before the Dewan of Travancore by Raman Ayyappan (*Kotimata Karayil Madathil Kalathil Eezham Raman Ayyappan*) on behalf of *Aa Chandra Thara Prosobhini Samajam* of Kottayam, reads as follows,

That we, the Ezhavas comprising more than 400 families in Kottayam town and living in total devotion to the government.

We are poor and helpless, to obstruct our freedom of movement, notice boards are being displayed by the government near the public road belonging to the Engineering

⁹⁵ K. R. Achuthan, 1971. 'C. Krishnan' (Biography- Mal.), Sahitya Pravarthaka Sanghom, Kottayam, pp. 33-34.

Department, going west by north of Tirunakkara Munsif Court, in the centre of Kottayam town, and that we are not allowed to use the road;

That these notice boards are to the effect that the Ezhavas and such untouchable castes should not walk along the road;

That, as it is not specified who the others are in the phrase the Ezhavas and others, it has to be pointed out that newly converted Christians, Kanis, Chakkilians, washer men, black smiths, masons etc., who are lower in rank than the Ezhavas travel along the road without any hindrance; that we have on several occasions submitted appeals on this subject to Dewan Peischar, Kottayam, Mr. Rama Krishnayyar Swami, and have received the endorsement accompanying this appeal.

The above mentioned endorsement (reply) says that the said road is a public road, and as it goes by the side of the Tirunakkara temple, we should not walk along it. But the road is constructed far away from the temple, and moreover, it is used by castes far lower in rank than us and there is no hindrance for Christians and others to carry fish and meat.

That the endorsement order of Peischar says that people belonging to the Ezhava caste and similar castes should not use that public road as per the notice board installed according to the Government Order of *21 Meenam 1077 M.E* (3 April 1902) It is known to all that government has declared that everybody, irrespective of caste can use a public road through an order published after *21 Meenam 1077 M.E* in the Government Gazette. Two years have elapsed since then.

On account of the obstruction of movement, a distance which can be covered within a quarter of a *Nazika* we, the poor and helpless have to walk two *Nazika* in a circuitous route:

That recently the government has issued orders allowing Ezhavas and Christians to walk along the village road near the temple at Vaikom, which is a non-Christians town, and to hand over the village road near the temple at Vaikom to the Engineering Department.

We humbly pray that our grievances be redressed by removing these notice boards prohibiting the Ezhavas to walk along the said public road, which being now used by people carrying fish and meat in Christian town.⁹⁶

The petition, while highlighting the plight of Ezhavas, imagines them in the Hindu fold. That is why it repeatedly mentions about the people below the rank of their castes and expresses indirect antipathy towards Christians and fish and meat.

SNDP Yogam took this issue and N. Kumaran Asan, the General Secretary himself wrote to Dewan Raja Gopalachary, vide the letter No. 622 dated 27 April 1911. The letter reads,

May it Please Your Excellency,

I most humbly beg leave to draw Your Excellency's kind attention to the lines marked in blue on page 262 of *Vivekodayam* the monthly organ of the SNDP Yogam, submitted herewith and request Your Excellency be pleased to see your way to redress the grievances of the Kottayam Ezhavas by issuing early orders doing away with the most unreasonable and at the same time humiliating prohibition against their walking through the public road mentioned therein.

Hoping to be kindly excused for the trouble and thanking Your Excellency in anticipation.

I beg to remain,

Yours Excellency most obedient servant

Sd/-

(Kumaran Asan)

General Secretary SNDP Yogam.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ *Judicial File, No. 66/1911 K.S.A, Trivandrum*. The subject of the files is: Exclusion of Ezhavas from using the road close to the Thirunakkara temple. The file consisted of the petitions of the aggrieved and the replies from government. But the issue remained unresolved. Finally, Kumaran Asan, General Secretary SNDP Yogam took up the issue, and he sent a letter to the Dewan along with a copy of *Vivekodayam*, dated *Makaram- Kumbhom 1086 M.E* (February –March 1911) Vol. No. VII, Issue No. 10 & 11, which highlighted the issue. (A *Nazhika* is equal to 24 minutes)

Aa Chandra Tara Prashobini Samajam

Aa Chandra Taaram (As long as moon and star exist = immortal) *Prashobini* (Glitter) *Samajam* (Society). One of the most prominent societies established by the Ezhavas in Travancore in 1907, mentioned neither by M. S.A. Rao nor by Robin Jeffrey

⁹⁷ Attached in *Judicial file 661/1911, KSA, Trivandrum*.

In the same *Vivekodayam*, a letter addressed to the General Secretary of SNDP Yogam was published. It was written by Kadhutha Krishnan, Secretary, *Kottayam Ezhava Samajam* dated 8 *Makaram 1086 M.E* (February 1911) explaining the plight of Ezhavas and the harrowing experiences of them on account of denial of freedom of movement.⁹⁸

Despite the claims of the government the real situation everywhere proved highly hostile to non-caste Hindus. A terrible situation existed in Travancore. The dynamics of caste influenced other religions also. Sometimes Christians and Mohammedans also imitated the practices of caste Hindus and this resulted in further oppression on non-caste Hindus. In one such incident T.K. Madhavan, then a high school student was asked to take off his *Methiyadi* (wooden slippers) by the Muslim merchants of Kayamkulam market.⁹⁹ This happened despite the entire market area was owned by his family.

Madhavan's education did not go beyond school level mainly due to his illness, acute *Asthma*. No other leader experienced such a trauma as T.K. Madhavan did, but he boldly withstood the challenge. It took his life at the prime of his activities, at the age of forty five.

T.K. Madhavan's personal diary (Researcher's Private Collection) for the year 1092 *M.E* (1916 – 1917) clearly shows intensity of his illness. On many days he was indisposed and struggled hard to combat his illness. On the initial days of Desabhimani he was terribly preoccupied with the paper work and that led to the worsening of his condition. From his diary - 'Slept during the day. Did not feel quite well. Went to press in the afternoon. Wrote, *Ezhavas and Travancore Government Service*. Returned home in the night on a rikshaw'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Kadutha Krishnan, 'Oru Jaati Sankatam' (A Caste Grievance), *Vivekodayam*, February-March 1911 (*Makaram-Kumbhom 1086 M.E*), p. 252.

⁹⁹ P. K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ T. K. Madhavan, Personal Diary, 27 October 1916 (11 *Thulam 1097 M.E*), Researcher's Private Collection. (hereafter called RPC) 'Ezhavas and Travancore Government Service', the article appeared in Desabhimani as the Editorial on 28 October 1916.

'Attack of Asthma. Finished writing *Avlude Mudi*. Finished accounts'.^{100(a)}
 'Went to Dr. Raman Thampi with wife and Revathy. Got medicine for me-
 began to vomit.'^{100(b)} 'Had a talk rather turbulent with editor in the night and
 some conclusions arrived at about the future management of the paper. Went
 out to see Dr. Raman Thampi in the evening and took medicine from him.'^{100(c)}

The suffering on account of *Asthma*, repeatedly mentioned in his diaries, became acute during the winter seasons and he struggled hard to breathe. The management problem of Desabhimani also caused much worry to him. The difference with T.K. Narayanan, the editor, finally led to his sacking from the post and T.K. Madhavan himself took the editorship on 27 January 1917. His diary also narrates financial stringencies on the running of the paper.

Launching of Desabhimani on 17 April 1915 was considered as a landmark event. By the time there was no Ezhava paper in Travancore except *Vivekodayam*. Papers like *Sujananandini*, *Kerala Sandesam*, and *Kerala Kaumudi* ceased their publication by 1915. *Kerala Kaumudi* started in 1911, disappeared by the beginning of 1915 and restarted some years later. Deshabhimani became the effective organ of Ezhavas in Travancore, relentlessly tried to retain Ezhava community within Hinduism. The first issue of Desabhimani highlighted the need for a weekly newspaper for Ezhavas. It observed that though Ezhavas were numerically strong they could not come to the forefront due to social inequities. To redress this situation a community paper seemed necessary.¹⁰¹

A newspaper with the same name was published from Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. There were amazing similarities between the Desabhimani edited by T.K. Madhavan and the Desabhimani edited by Sesachalapathi Madhava Rao, a

^{100(a)} *Ibid.*, 30 October 1916. [*Avalude Mudi* (Her Hair), the short story published in *Desabhimani*, 14 November 1916]

^{100(b)} *Ibid.*, 31 October 1916.

^{100(c)} *Ibid.*, 1 November 1916.

¹⁰¹ Editorial, 'Prastavana' (Declaration) *Desabhimani*, 17 April 1915.

Brahmin. Both strongly opposed conversion and wanted to do away with social inequities to stall the conversion attempts of non caste Hindus. In the similar vein both held the view that conversion should be stalled or else Hinduism would be in danger. Desabhimani from Guntur clearly identified the subtle relation between nation and Hinduism.¹⁰² It seems that T.K. Madhavan was completely unaware of the existence of the newspaper published from Andhra Pradesh.

Desabhimani's position on conversion was not so virulent at the beginning. It expressed anguish over the way the converted non - caste Hindus were addressed by caste Hindus. It deplored the practice of calling converted people as *Pula Christian* (Hindu Pulaya converted to Christian) and *Para Christian* (Hindu Paraya converted to Christian) and it also observed that those Ezhavas converted into Christianity were not called as Ezhava Christians. But here Deshabhimani seemed unaware of the situation prevailed in South Travancore. In Neyyattinkara taluk places like Kodangavila and Manaluvila those Ezhavas converted to Christianity were ridiculously called as *Eekrikal* means Ezhava Christians. They maintained a separate church at Kodangavila. Local Ezhava leadership complained to Naryana Guru and SNDP leadership that these people behaved like Christians but retained their Ezhava traits in their personal lives. Narayana Guru gave his clarification (*Vivekodayam* says it was an order) that they should not be allowed to participate in community events.¹⁰³

The clarification of Narayana Guru provides vital clues on the position of the leadership of SNDP Yogam in the event of a group or a person leaving

¹⁰² *Desabhimani* (Telugu Daily News paper), Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, 31 December 1909, NNPR, TNA.

¹⁰³ *Vivekodayam*, 'Nammude Palavaka' (Our Miscellany), 32 *Mithunam* 1079 M.E (June 1904), Book No.1, Issue No.2, p. 41.

In the same issue, a person from Thevalakkara, raised another doubt. His question was, whether an Ezhava woman who had an 'affair' with a man belonging to another religion could be retained in her community – to which Narayana Guru clarified that - She should be ostracized from the community and if she tendered atonement she could be pardoned and purified. For this an amount should be collected from her towards fine and that amount be kept as a common fund of the community.

Hindu religion. The Narayana movement problematised the national movement and took a positive stand towards colonial rule but never took a hostile position against Hinduism officially. This is mentioned here to point out that the same was the position of T.K. Madhavan and Desabhimani on these issues. Later Madhavan also became an arch nationalist contrary to the earlier position of SNDP Yogam.

Madhavan consistently used his paper to create awareness among the Ezhavas not to fall into the trap of conversion. He took enormous pain to get Hindu religion be reformed and to accommodate the Ezhavas within it. He strongly critiqued the Ezhava leaders, who favored conversion. Desabhimani carried several editorials in this line during the period. Deshabhimani made scathing attacks on Swami Sivaprasad and P Thanuvan, brother of Dr. Palpu, who espoused the idea of converting Ezhavas to Buddhism.¹⁰⁴

Desabhimani consistently campaigned for the cause of the community. School admission and government employment were the two issues always highlighted and debated threadbare. It took special interest in the issue of denial of admission to Ezhava students in Kottarakkara Higher Grade Elementary Girls' School, owing to the proximity to Ganapathy temple.¹⁰⁵ Desabhimani closely tracked the issue of denial of the admission. In a strongly worded editorial '*Fresh Excuses of Education Director*' it condemned L.D. Hudson, the then Director of Public Instructions.¹⁰⁶ The problem remained unresolved till 1919. In Kottarakkara taluk there were more than twelve thousand Ezhavas lived. Despite this numerical strength authorities did not yield.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Editorial, *Desabhimani*, 17 March 1917.

¹⁰⁵ P. Govinda Pillai, 'Ezhavarum Kottarakkara Higher Grade Elementary Penn Pallikkoodavum' (Ezhavas and Kottarakkara Higher Grade Elementary Girls School), *Desabhimani*, 15 July 1916.

¹⁰⁶ Editorial, *Desabhimani*, 3 March 1917.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, 'Government School Pravesanavum' (Government and School Admission), *Desabhimani*, 12 May 1917 and 26 May 1917.

Right from the inception Desabhimani took up the issue of *Sanchara Swatantryam* (freedom of movement) of Ezhavas. On account of the denial of freedom of movement in public roads and other places many riots occurred. In central Travancore riots broke out between Nairs and Ezhavas in various places including Kadammanitta and Thotapuzhasseri Vengalloor. These riots occurred in early 1916 on account of Ezhavas' non- co-operation with temple festivals. They dissociated since they were denied access to temples and the roads surrounding them. Upper castes required Ezhava's manual labour, offerings and money to conduct the festival. Reports of these riots and their aftermaths are elaborately discussed in Desabhimani.¹⁰⁸

T.K. Madhavan also critiqued the government on the *Sanchara Swatantryam* issue as the Christians and Mohammedans enjoyed this right. Desabhimani wrote scores of editorials against Christians as they enjoyed excessive privileges in many areas. It criticized authorities for providing undue concession to the English Medical College run by Salvation Army at the premises of Catherine booth hospital, Nagercoil and alleged that this was an official encouragement to conversion.¹⁰⁹ Similarly it criticized certain Convents run by the Christians for the partisan attitude of the school authorities towards non-Christian students.¹¹⁰

On one occasion, Desabhimani was at loggerheads with Muslim community in Aleppey. The government denied permission to conduct a procession in connection with the 60th birth anniversary celebrations of Narayana Guru in Aleppey town. Government took the decision following the complaint made by some Muslims.¹¹¹ T.K. Madhavan considered the denial of freedom to conduct the procession would eventually encourage conversion

¹⁰⁸ Desabhimani, 'Thottapuzhasseri Vengalloor, Kadammanitta Lahala' (Riots), 6 May 1916

¹⁰⁹ Editorial, 'Anuchitamaaya Angeekaaram' (Improper Recognition), Desabhimani, 16 July 1916.

¹¹⁰ Desabhimani, 14 October 1916.

¹¹¹ Desabhimani, 30 September 1916.

among the Ezhavas. Despite this apprehension it was a fact that government acted in a highly partisan manner and the action of the Muslims could not be justified. Desabhimani observed that the government action was an indirect encouragement to conversion. As *Raman* and *Krishnan* (read as Hindus) they cannot conduct a procession but if they became *Mohammed Kunju* and *Abdullah* (read as Muslims) they can.¹¹² It is quite clear that the question of conversion had caused much worry to Madhavan while upholding the cause of Ezhavas.

In Travancore conflict between Ezhavas and Muslims seldom occurred. In Aleppey, the Venice of East some of the best initiatives of Muslim reform movement took place. Here the *Lajmathul Mohammediya Sabha*, the most important reformist organization of Muslims in Travancore made deep inroads. It opposed the orthodox outlook of Muslims and took up the cause of their education. The initiative of Vakkom Abdul Khader Maulavi under the auspices of this society made huge impact.¹¹³ The relation between Muslims and Ezhavas in Travancore was generally cordial and reciprocal. In an interview, Dr. Babu Vijayanath, son of T.K. Madhavan recollected the cordial and reciprocal relation between the families of T.K. Madhavan and P.K. Kunju (Puthen Purackkal, Kayamkulam) a prominent leader of the Muslim community who had later become a minister in the government headed by E.M.S Namboodiripad in 1967 in Kerala.¹¹⁴

However in one incident at Manacaud in the suburb of Triavndrum city, clashes between Ezhavas and Muslims occurred. The disputes started on account of performing a drama. Muslims alleged that the content of the drama was against Islam. Despite the protest the play was performed on 1 January 1930 and clashes took place on 3 February 1930, in which an Ezhava youth

¹¹² Editorial, 'Neethi Viruddhamaya Utharavu' (An Unjust Order), *Desabhimani*, 14 July 1916.

¹¹³ S. Sharafudeen, 1983. *Vaikkom Maulavi: A Study*, Trivandrum, Sankramanam Publishers, p.20.

¹¹⁴ Babu Vijayanath, 'Interview with the author', at his residence, Keerikkad, Kayamkulam, 25 September 2004.

succumbed to his injury. Peace was restored after a conciliatory meeting on 25 February 1930 chaired by Ulloor. S. Parameswara Iyer.¹¹⁵

The incident at Alleppey should be viewed in the backdrop of process of identity assertions of Ezhavas, which precipitate sometimes necessary confrontation with other religions. Staging a procession in connection with a community function should be viewed as a form of struggle to capture the public sphere, where their accessibility was severely restricted. In Alleppey town, the wealthy Muslim merchants who owned considerable tracts of urban land and market places might have been strongly influenced by the caste system and imbibed the values of Hindu culture.

Civic Right Struggle: Interrogating the Social Structure, Democratizing the Society

The Civic Right Movement (1918-22) indeed radically changed the socio-political milieu of Travancore. The impact of the agitation was similar to that of Cultural Revolution (1966-76) led by Mao- Tse-Tung in the Chinese society. 'The Cultural Revolution seeks to change people in what is more profound.'¹¹⁶ This analogy is derived after going through an editorial of *Desabhimani*, which spearheaded the Civic Right Movement. It unequivocally declared its aim, dismissing the vilification campaign against it. 'The Civic Rightists demand that there should not be any discrimination based on religion or community which will injure the self respect of the human being'.¹¹⁷

Civic right agitation was the first major social movement which tremendously democratized the archaic Travancore society. It aimed at equal

¹¹⁵ Confidential File No 779/1930, K.S.A, Trivandrum.

¹¹⁶ K. H. Fan, 1968. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, New York, Monthly Review Press, p.162. This is the first among the sixteen point circular (Manifesto of the Cultural Revolution) issued by the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party on 8 Aug 1966.

¹¹⁷ Editorial, *Desabhimani*, 1 February 1919.

opportunities to all citizens in the process of power sharing, a pre-requisite for a meaningful democratic society. Civic Right Movement was primarily intended for the separation of Revenue department from Devesowm, so as to enable the non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus get appointed in the Revenue department. Though this was the main agenda, the general content of the movement was to attain civic rights of more than 26 lakhs of citizens in Travancore. For the first time, it interrogated the concept of *Praja* (subject) and posed people as *Pourar* (citizen). The agitation was known as *Paura Samathwa Vadam* (Demand for Equal Right to Citizens) which shows the historic importance of this struggle.

T.K. Madhavan's active participation in the movement had certainly reoriented its nature, as he was able to effect a significant change in its agenda. Madhavan and his paper relentlessly canvassed for the agitation. The period 1918-1922 that witnessed tumultuous events defined Madhavan in the social milieu of Travancore. T.K. Madhavan organized his community under the banner of temple entry agitation and at the same time he was able to incorporate this specific demand of Ezhavas in the agenda of civic right agitation. This is considered as the great achievement of Madhavan since the demand of temple entry of Ezhavas became a kind of Pan-Travancore movement transcending the boundaries of Ezhava community.

Civic right movement paved the way for the historic alliance between non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus like Christian and Muslims, bringing far-reaching changes. Many traits of the modern and democratic society of Kerala have been evolved through this agitation. The concept of the participatory role of the unprivileged and involving the majority of the population in the power sharing process was materialized in a significant way for the first time by this agitation. The movement is uniquely historical as the present system of Public Services based on social justice evolved after this agitation.

In Travancore for the first time a meaningful coalition of Ezhavas, Muslims and Christians came into being. Civic right movement was the first organized political agitation upholding the just rights of religious

minorities. The initiatives of the non-caste Hindus particularly the Ezhavas to effect an alliance with Muslims and Christians in Travancore assumed significant dimensions. The 'othering' process of Hindu nationalist movement tried to imagine the nation and to homogenize umpteen castes within Hinduism and Muslims and Christians were placed as 'Others'. But here in Travancore the 'othering' was negated by effecting an alliance of Ezhavas, Muslims and Christians.

Secondly the census statistics of Travancore was always projected as a tool to imagine Hindus by saying about decrease in Hindu population and corresponding increase in Christians. From 1816-1911 almost all debates followed after each census were centered on this. In the Civic right agitation, the alliance with Christians caused a set back to this kind of arguments. N. Kunjan Pillai provides a graphic account of decrease in growth rate of Hindu population and increase in growth rate of Christians.¹¹⁸

Table 5

Year	Total Population	Hindus & Tribal Religions		Christians		Muslims	
		Actual Number	% of the total Population	Actual Number	% of the total Population	Actual Number	% of the Total Population
1816-20	906587	752371	83.0	112158	12.4	42058	4.6
1875	2311379	1702149	73.6	469023	20.3	140056	6.1
1881	2401158	1755610	73.1	498542	20.8	146909	6.1
1891	2557736	1871864	73.2	526911	20.6	158823	6.2
1901	3428975	2063798	69.9	697387	23.6	190556	6.5
1911	4006062	2298390	67.0	903868	26.4	226617	6.6
1921	5095973	2562301	64.0	1172934	29.3	270478	6.7

Still census data are used by official Ezhava leadership as an appropriate tool for Hindu unity and urged the government to take suitable action to stall the conversion among the non-caste Hindus, especially among Ezhavas.¹¹⁹ But the historic Civic Right agitation interrogated both nationalist conception of 'othering' and the process of Hindu unity argued on the basis of census statistics.

¹¹⁸ N. Kunjan Pillai, 1932. *Census of India, 1931, Vol, XXVIII, Travancore Part I Report*, Trivandrum, p. 331.

¹¹⁹ N. Kumaran Asan, 'Thiruvitamkoorile Hindukkalude Vardhanakuravu' (Missing Growth of Hindus in Travancore), *Vivekodayam*, October 1912 (*Thulam 1088 M.E*), Book No.9, Issue No.7, pp. 220-25.

There were more than 6.5 lakhs of Ezhavas in Travancore says *Vivekodayam*. It argued that various denominations of the community were not included in the Ezahava category.¹²⁰ Quoting from the census report it said that the Tiyyas or Ezhavas of Travancore were equally important as Namboodiris and Nairs. Their industriousness was their famous valiant feature and always remained the lifeblood of earth and they continued to be like this.¹²¹

Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims, were traditionally denied opportunities in Revenue and Military departments. Revenue was attached with Devasowm department. As it dealt with temples and their management, the non caste Hindus were not permitted in department according to caste rules, which was the law of land.

Demand for Government Employment: The Painful History

The demand of non-caste Hindus and non- Hindus for government employment in the Revenue department slowly gathered momentum by the turn of 20th century. In the second session of Sree Moolam Popular Assembly (SMPA) the issue was raised by A.D. Arumanayagom, the nominated member who represented South Travancore Native Christian Association, Nagercoil and was supported by S. Padhmanabha Pillai, member from Karunagapally Taluk, Quilon Division.¹²² Christians by virtue of their education were fairly represented in other departments of Travancore service. This prompted them to demand for their share in revenue also. The Christian associations raised this demand right from the beginning.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹²¹ N. Subramaniya Iyer, 'Travancore Census Report 1911', cited in *Vivekodayam*, October 1912, p. 218.

¹²² *Proceedings of the Second Session of Sree Moolam Popular Assembly* (hereafter called SMPA), Second day, 22 October 1905.

Copy of the proceedings obtained from Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library, London.

The Ezhava demand for government jobs dates back to the memorials submitted by them in 1895 and 1896. In the second memorial, signed by 13176 Ezhavas submitted to the King of Travancore, they conveyed their wish and requested the King not to compel them to embrace other religions on account of denial of opportunities in government service. They also said that it was painful to leave Travancore and Hinduism to get their grievances solved and further affirmed their deep-rooted attachment towards Hinduism and loyalty and patriotism towards Travancore.¹²³

Most of the government jobs, especially almost all supervisory posts were reserved for caste Hindus. Despite the educational progress achieved by oppressed castes under odd conditions, they were excluded from government jobs. The educational progresses of the various communities are evident from the following table.

Table No – 5 ¹²⁴

Community	1089 M.E (1914)	1090 M.E (1915)	Difference 1089 M.E (1914)	Difference 1090 M.E (1915)
Nair	70752	81034	+6028	+10282
Ezhava	23895	30790	+3171	+6895
Christian	84161	96648	+9957	+12487
Mohammedan	4853	6095	-104	+1242
Pulaya	2017	4256	+826	+2223
Paraya	1097	1816	-190	+719

Steady increase has been witnessed in subsequent years also. By the year 1093 M.E (1917-18) the increasing number is shown below.

¹²³ Dr. Palpu, (Rpt.) 1988. *Thiruvitamkotte Ezhavar*, compiled and edited by N.K. Damodaran, Trivandrum, p, 51-53.

¹²⁴ *Report on the Administration of Travancore (TAR) 1090 M.E (1914 - 15)* p. 60.

Table No – 6 ¹²⁵

Community	Number of Scholars	Number of Scholars	Increase/ Decrease
	<i>1092 M.E (1917)</i>	<i>1093 M.E (1918)</i>	
Nair	99490	98709	-781
Ezhava	45429	51114	+5685
Christians	1,19563	1,27232	+7669
Mohommedan	9558	11106	+1554
Pulaya	10913	17753	+6840

Mitavadi criticized the Administration Report which observed that the depressed communities are indebted to the upper castes for their educational progress. In the subsequent year, 1919 the educational progress of the depressed communities showed a marked decline except in the case of Christians. 'The decline among the backward classes was mainly due to economic stresses'.¹²⁶ But the subsequent years witnessed remarkable progress.¹²⁷

The proportionate representation in government employment remained abysmally low. Out of the total population of 34 lakhs, Ezhavas constituted nearly 5 lakhs. Out of the total government employment (13118) Ezhavas held only 86. The total Nair population was 5, 61,100 in 1901 but they enjoyed 8906 number of posts, which was more than 60% of the total employment opportunities. Brahmins just over 5000 in population enjoyed 1969 posts. Christians nearly 7 lakhs in population enjoyed 749 government jobs. Mohammedans, lagged behind in all spheres, enjoyed only 231 jobs. *Vivekodayam* says that the conditions of Ezhavas are appalling and it reminds the government that the moment they convert, their social inequities will disappear.¹²⁸ The anguish is clear. Government must immediately take step to redress their grievances to keep them in the Hindu fold. Despite this effort of

¹²⁵ *Mitavadi*, 'TAR 1093' (1917-18), March 1919, p.107.

¹²⁶ *TAR 1094 M.E* (1918-19), 'Education', p. 253.

¹²⁷ *TAR 1095 M.E* (1919-20), p. 256 and *TAR 1096 M.E* (1920-21), p. 88.

¹²⁸ *Vivekodayam*, 'Sarkar Udyogathinulla Avakasam' (The Right to Government Employment), July 1905, Book No.2, Issue No. 3, pp. 1-2.

Ezhava leadership the government did not take any positive steps in this direction. Thus the Civic Right Movement in a sense was a process of de-imaging Hindus, though not directly. It was well echoed in an editorial by T.K. Madhavan, 'in the affairs of religion, community and state administration everybody must have equal rights. Some caste Hindus falsely propagate that the Civic Right agitation will endanger their privileges. We wonder how the demand for equal opportunity in government service and demand for abolition of untouchability and other social evils will injure their privileges. If they still want to retain these privileges, it amounts to denying justice to the 26 lakhs of a Civic Rightists and is nothing else'.¹²⁹

Civic right movement was a trend setter. 'Although the immediate objective of agitation was to get civic rights of the non- caste Hindus and non Hindus, to be appointed in the land revenue department of Travancore, its ultimate aim was elimination of all social discriminations among the citizens of the state as prelude to the political empowerment'.¹³⁰ This political empowerment exactly posed a threat to the privileges of the upper castes. Why were the government jobs so dear to the people of Travancore? In Travancore the government officials were considered as *Gods* by the common people.¹³¹ Such a mindset was consciously manufactured and the state encouraged this tendency as most of its official's belonged to upper castes.

The issue of under representation of non-Hindus especially Christians and non-caste Hindus like Ezhavas in government services were repeatedly raised in the successive sessions of SMPA. The demand for better representations of Christians in government service was very often raised in the legislative bodies rather effectively. This has also brought a cleavage between them and other non-caste Hindus, who were grossly under- represented in the

¹²⁹ *Desabhimani*, 1 February 1919.

¹³⁰ C. N. Somarajan and S. Sivadasan, 1995. *Civic Right Movement in Travancore*, Kollam, S.N. Publishing House, p. 2.

¹³¹ *Vivekodayam*, 'Vyavasayam' (Industry), *Mithunam* 1080 M.E (July 1905), p.2.

government service. But the common plight of the communities created a sense of belonging among them. In the third session of SMPA Raman Narayana Pillai, the elected member from Ettumanoor taluk demanded separation of Devasowm and Land Revenue departments, for the effective management of Devasowm affairs. The *Tahsildars* were unable to attend Devasowm affairs as they were pre-occupied with revenue matters. C.P. Thomas, member deputed by Representative Associations (the Travancore and Cochin Christian Association Kottayam) raised the same issue for a different reason. He wanted to facilitate Christian's entry in the Revenue Department. He eloquently presented the demand with facts and figures, vehemently criticized the orthodox nature of the state and attacked bureaucracy.

Dewan, S. Gopalachariar in his reply categorically said the separation was neither desirable nor feasible considering the nature of the state. He added that those who demanded separation didn't know the history of the state. The state policy was adopted by Marthanda Varrma, by which the whole state was a gift to the presiding deity after pouring water in a manner to which tradition attaches efficiency and Devasowms were part and parcel of the state, and it was not possible with the present growing demand upon the finances of the state to constitute a separate department of the administration of Devasowms which had been appertained to the Revenue department from time immemorial.¹³²

Even before S.Gopalachariar, it was Dewan V.P. Madhava Row (1904-06) who highlighted the same reason to a petition presented to him by the *Catholic Christian Mahajana Sabha*, asking for the separation of Devesowm and Revenue.¹³³ As per the census report of 1901 the number of educated

¹³² *Proceedings of the Third Session of SMPA*, 1907. Trivandrum, Travancore Government Press, pp. 115-16 and Dewan's reply in pp.118-19.

¹³³ *Confidential File No. 544/1921*, KSA, Trivandrum. (This incident was cited in the pamphlet, '*Caste and Citizenship in Travancore*', issued by the Civic Right League which tracks the history of the agitation. The pamphlet is attached in this file)

Ezhavas crossed 30 thousand and out of 30 *Tahslidars* and more than 200 *Provertikars* there was not even a single Ezhava.¹³⁴

In the 4th and 5th session of SMPA also the demand for separation of Devasowm and Revenue was raised by various members. Along with this demand the Ezhava members also highlighted the plight of their community in getting admission in government schools. N. Kumaran Asan presented it with supporting evidences.¹³⁵

According to the 1911 census report there were 13602 officials in all departments including military and police. The Nairs occupied 2763 positions in military and police and in other departments they occupied 3827 position, while Brahmins and Christians got 2594 and 2867 positions respectively. Out of every 100 government jobs Nairs held 41, Brahmins 19 and Christians 29: while Ezhavas and other castes got only 11 positions. There were only 120 posts that went to Ezhavas.¹³⁶

It is very important to note the fact that the question of separation of Land Revenue from Devasowm was not forcefully argued by the Ezhava members of the legislature in the beginning. This is quite evident from the debates held in the legislature. The above mentioned issue of *Vivekodayam* (1088 *Chingom* and *Kanni ME*, Book No 9 issue No. 5 - 6) did not problematize the question of separation but stressed the need to accommodate Ezhavas in other departments. That is why Civic Right Movement was considered as the movement of Christians of Travancore. But the intervention of T.K. Madhavan effected drastic change in this character. Mdhavan was able to include the

¹³⁴ *Vivekodayam*, 'SMPA Naalam Sammelanam' (SMPA Fourth Session), *Vrischigom - Dhanu* 1083 M.E, Book No.4, Issue No. 8 and 9, pp.4-6.

¹³⁵ *Proceedings of SMPA 5th session* - Kumaran Asan, on 'Removal of Disabilities of Ezhavas', 12 November 1908.

¹³⁶ *Vivekodayam*, 'Ezhavarum Government Udyogavum' (Ezhavas and Government Service), *Chingom-Kanni 1088 M.E* (August- September 1912), pp.185-87.

removal of social disabilities of Ezhavas as one of the aims of Civic Right Movement.

Despite the demands of Ezhavas presented in well articulated terms, government remained unchanged. Dewan and other officials repeatedly reminded the nature of Travancore state in which inclusion of Ezhavas in government service without restriction could not be expected, so was the question of separation of Revenue from Devaswom.

T.K. Madhavan and his paper consistently took the issue of government jobs due to Ezhavas, since *Desabhimani* was launched. In a famous editorial '*Travancore Government and Ezhavas*' the issue was forcefully presented. This editorial was penned by T.K. Madhavan though he was not the editor of the paper at that time as his personal diary reveals.¹³⁷

The attempts of the aggrieved communities to redress their legitimate grievances ultimately led to the formation of *Tiruvitamkoor Paura Sabha* (Travancore Civic Right League) in 1918 which led the Civic Right agitation. Civic Right League was formed largely at the initiative of Christians. Their disappointment was well echoed by leaders like E.J. John. Kottayam town remained the hub of activities of the League, as the Christian interest was heavily involved in this agitation. The biography of Tariath Kunji Thomman vividly describes this aspect.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Editorial, *Tiruvitamkoor Governmentum Ezhavarum*, (Travancore Government and Ezhavas) *Desabhimani*, 28 October 1916. Also see 'T.K. Madhavan's Personal Diary, 27 October 1916, RPC.

Slept during the day. Did not feel quite well. Mannar Desath Kuttan came here and stayed here on that day. Pattoor Narayanan went home. Wrote 'Ezhavas and Travancore Government Service', went to the press in the evening. Returned home in the night on Riskshaw.

(&) P. K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 61.

¹³⁸ John Kachiramattom, 2002. *Shevliar Elenjikkal Tariath Kunji Thomman* (Biography- Mal), Kottayam, Kachiramattom Foundations, pp.75-85.

Whenever the Ezhava demands were raised by T.K. Madhavan and Desabhimani they compared Ezhava position with that of Christians. On many issues Desabhimani overtly and covertly critiqued the undue concessions given to the Christians and the patronage they received from the government. The primary reason behind this antagonism was that those Ezhavas converted into Christian religion enjoyed enormous social status and benefit. Madhavan's anxiety was that this would lead to further conversion.

But when the move of Civic Right agitation was in its offing, T.K. Madhavan extended his solidarity with Christians. Madhavan highlighted the grievances of Christians in one of his editorials, based on the speech of C.P.Thomas demanding separation of Land Revenue from Devasowm department in the 13th session of SMPA.¹³⁹

In a meeting of the citizens of Kottayam town held on 7 November 1918, it was decided that caste and religion should not be obstructing factors in getting employment in Trvancore. Ezhavas, Mohammedans and Christians together constituted 26 lakhs out of the 35 lakhs of the total population in Travancore. Their exclusion from the Devesowm and Revenue departments of Travancore government service was against all accepted norms of civil rights and self respect of the majority of population. It was injurious to the healthy relations existed among the various communities of the state and hence the *Model State* should initiate urgent steps to meet the just demands of the majority of the population, the meeting urged the government.

The meeting decided to convene a grand conference to press the demands further and the resolutions adopted in this meeting were to be sent to the Personal Secratary to Travancore Maharaja, the British Residents to Cochin

¹³⁹ Editorial, 'Government Servisum Christianikalum' (Government Service and Christians), *Desabhimani*, 10 March 1917.

and Travancore states, Governor, Viceroy and news papers in Travancore and other places.¹⁴⁰

The Christian discontent was rampant, so they were the sections remained in the forefront of agitation. The novel concept of civic right ushered new sensibility. Though Ezhavas and Mohammedans were not in their full vigor and enthusiasm, they had no other alternative than to ally and support the agitation. T.K. Madhavan espoused the cause of civic right agitation and did it through his paper. In a fervent appeal to his own community he analysed the new upsurge in the context of the First World War.

This war had caused many untold suffering and destruction to the world, but it has some positive aspects also. The values of liberty and equality have gained considerable acceptance through out the world and its influence (stream) has reached Travancore also. The 26 lakhs of his Highness' subjects of Travancore now realized their rights, who reeled under many hardships and now decided to submit their grievances in the ensuing SMPA session, to be held in Feb 1919. They earnestly believe that the government will look into the matter positively, which will help in fostering communal amity between various sections and will help to maintain a good future to the country. Ezhavas one of the prominent sections experienced many social inequities and are denied their rights. So Ezhavas must rise to the occasion and hope they will discharge their duties and concentrate their efforts until they get their due share.¹⁴¹

The activities of *Catholic Christian Mahajana Sabha* formed in 1905, was a prelude to Civic Right Movement in Travancore. In 1907 this organization convened a meeting at Vaikom presided by Kunhavira Tarakan and constituted a committee to study and report the grievances of Catholic community.¹⁴² Malayala Manorama and Nazrani Deepika were more vocal in this regard. Malayala Manorama criticised the government's policy of non-

¹⁴⁰ *Desabhimani*, 'Paurasamathwa Vaada Sanghom' (Civic Right League) 30 November 1918.

¹⁴¹ Editorial, 'Irupathettu Lakshathinte Avakaasam' (The Claim of Twenty Six Lakhs), *Desabhimani*, 21 December 1918.

¹⁴² John Kachiramattom, *op.cit.*, pp.75-76.

inclusion of non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus in the Revenue Department.¹⁴³ Nazrani Deepika observed that if Devesowm expenditure was met from its own revenue, it was not right on the part of other communities for a claim in that department, but it was not so. The department existed with the revenue income from other departments, collected from various other communities and as such they have every right to claim jobs in that department. If the government considered that the Christians could not be admitted in the revenue department, then it was wise to separate it from Devasowm.¹⁴⁴

Nazrani Deepika further alleged that owing to this disability imposed on Christians, educated and able men from this community sought employment in other states, where they did well. It further urged the government to separate Land Revenue Department from Devasowm and accommodate Christians as done in the state of Cochin.¹⁴⁵

Ezhava psyche as stated earlier was not completely in favour of the cause of Christians and it is very clear from the writings of Ezhava press. Citing from the list of the civil servants published by the Travancore government even *Mitavadi*, expressed its anguish. According to this the total number of government officials, who drew a monthly salary over Rs 100/- were 572. Out of these 572 posts, Nairs held 118; Christians 164 and Brahmins held 206 positions and rest of the 82 positions were held by all communities together. The total number of government officials in Travancore, who drew a monthly salary over Rs 400/- were 74, of which 24 were Brahmins, 11 Nairs and 34 Christians. Even when the situation was like this the Christians demanded more positions.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ *Malayala Manorama*, 1 & 8 April 1919

¹⁴⁴ *Nazrani Deepika*, 19 March 1918.

¹⁴⁵ *NNPR 1918*, TNA, Chennai, p.547.

¹⁴⁶ *Mitavadi*, November 1916, Book No.4, Issue No.11, pp. 53-54.

T.K. Madhavan Contextualises the Civic Right Movement

T.K. Madhavan and Desabhimani, the mouth piece of Ezhavas, from the very beginning expressed its apprehension towards the movement. The movement was actually the brain child of Christian community. Kottayam remained the centre of activities of the movement under the leadership of John Chandy and E.J. John. The central demand of the Civic Right League was bifurcation of the Devasowm department so as to facilitate non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus entry into the Revenue department. The demand for abolition of untouchability and unseeability was also included as such it received support from Ezhava community. But T.K. Madhavan's reservation was on the marginalization of the core issue which was temple entry to all Ezhavas and other Avarnas in the charter of demands of the Civic Right League. He considered the unqualified admission of Ezhavas in all temples maintained by public fund was a basic issue of civic right. The intention and ideological nuances of the temple entry question will be discussed in the next chapter.

The demand for abolition of untouchability and other social disabilities were viewed as the pre-condition to get entry in to government jobs by the Civic Rightists. Madhavan held that the question of untouchability was not directly concerned with Christians and Mohammedans and as such it should be shouldered by Ezhavas. He considered that the right to enter the temples would automatically lead to eradication of untouchability and other social evils. Time and again Madhavan stressed the issue of temple entry which caused much annoyance to the leadership of Civic Right Movement. But Madhavan's intervention qualitatively changed the character of the movement as he strongly pressed the demand of temple entry to be included in the agenda of civic right agitation.

The direction on which the Civic Right Movement progressed proved T.K. Madhavan's prediction right. Right from the beginning Madhavan and his

paper portrayed the civic right agitation as a movement which would assume bigger proportions than what the leadership originally intended. He observed 'many consider that civic right agitation is intended only for getting entry of 26 lakhs subjects of His Highness in the Revenue Department. Even the press limited the intention of Civic Right in such a fashion after reading the circular issued by the Civic Right League. This is absolutely a false notion'.¹⁴⁷ Desabhimani took immense pain to explain the real agenda of the Civic Right Movement, which was also to obtain the entry of all Hindu subjects in the government run temples. This was exactly the point in which the Civic Right Movement deviated from its functional sphere. T.K. Madhavan not only included this agenda but he himself actively participated in it and used all opportunities at his disposal to make Civic Right Movement (CRM) a success.

The Editorial of Desabhimani dated 1 February 1919 discussed the niceties of the movement. It accepted that, in CRM the Christians played a dominant role. Among the Hindus, certain sections asked why Ezhavas extended their support to Christians. The answer was that those who upheld the cause of the oppressed must be united. Reasons for his association with the civic right agitation as well as the participation of Ezhavas in the movement were explained by T.K. Madhavan in an editorial in Desabhimani. The real issue was the massive erosion of Hindu population in Travancore as census statistics repeatedly showed, a real concern to Madhavan. He chalked out a plan and fixing the demand of Ezhavas (Temple Entry) as the demand of the 26 lakhs of Trvancoreans was part of this. This plan drove him to associate with CRM and later made him the champion of the movement.

The initial reservations and differences of Madhavan were aired through his paper, which in turn helped in changing the situation. In one of his editorials he offered a healthy criticism towards the Civic Right League. Here he offered a

¹⁴⁷ *Desabhimani*, 1 February 1919.

detailed comment on Circular No.1, issued by the Civic Right League (CRL) from Kottayam.¹⁴⁸

At the outset he hailed the intentions and programme of Civic Right, envisaged in Circular No.1.¹⁴⁹ Madhavan hinted that the content of the circular was acceptable in general, but he expressed his apprehension, saying that the circular either misunderstood facts or it pretended so. Circular says 'the communities who demand for civic rights are not really concerned about the number of employment to be achieved, they are concerned about the government policy which does not allow others to reach important positions in government service due to caste and religious grounds. This practice must be stopped or else the aggrieved communities will not be pacified, this is our opinion'.¹⁵⁰ It is very clear from the circular that Christian community which already enjoyed considerable position in government jobs were unable to reach in the supervisory posts or in important positions in Revenue Department due to their religion. This contention was not acceptable to T.K. Madhavan and he said that this would lead to conflicts between Christians and other communities. He also attacked the directions of the circular which asked people to adopt a resolution in the following manner.

Untouchability and unseeability which are practiced in Travancore have to be abandoned forthwith. To this effect, government had already issued a circular dated 21 July 1884; it was revalidated and published in March 1908. This government circular has to be further modified to enable the poor people's unconditional entry in to all public places and all institutions maintained by public fund.

Madhavan interrogated the circular of the Civic Right League on the ground why temples were not specifically mentioned. He further added 'though the circular demand the abolition of untouchability, the stress has given to the

¹⁴⁸ Editorial, *Desabhimani*, 11 January 1919.

¹⁴⁹ *Civic Right League Circular No. 1*, John Chandy, Kottayam, December 1918.

¹⁵⁰ *Op.cit.*, No.148. pp. 8-9.

question of employment, this is not right and the League must work for the abolition of all injustices’.

The criticism and estrangement of T.K. Madhavan in this regard continued even after the CRM came to an end. T.K. Madhavan was critical towards the Christian leadership of the CRM which he expressed even as late as in 1925.¹⁵¹ The estrangement continued through out the movement but T.K. Madhavan earnestly associated with it and was able to reorient the movement.

T.K. Madhavan Campaigns

T.K. Madhavan effectively intervened and championed the cause of Ezhavas within the movement. This specific intervention had far reaching impacts. Numerous meetings of Ezhava community were organised through out the length and breadth of Travancore and resolutions were adopted asking the Maharaja and his government to take urgent steps to redress the grievances of Civic Rightists including that of Temple entry. It is interesting to note that the resolutions were adopted and copies sent to Dewan and the authorities concerned along with a copy to T.K. Madhavan. At that time he was a member designate in the ensuing 15th session of SMPA, to be started in February 1919. The resolutions asked him to submit the question of temple entry of Ezhavas in the assembly. Most of the meetings were conducted with lavish support from Alumoottil family.

In a period when the temple entry demand was yet to gain momentum within the CRM, T.K. Madhavan was able to take the decisive steps to overcome the challenge. His role in the CRM did not confine to the issues of

¹⁵¹ Editorial, ‘Kerala Dasanum Nangalum’ (Kerala Dasan and We), *Desabhimani*, 25 July 1925. This editorial, a reaction to *Kerala Dasan* which misinterpreted *Desabhimani* when it reproduced an article by Mannath Padhmanabha Pillai, ‘Civic Right and Avarnas’, originally appeared in *Samadarshi*. This editorial observed ‘--yet we have difficulties in agreeing that all actions of Civic Right Movement leadership were innocent’.

mere Ezhava representation in government jobs and separation of Revenue from Devasowm. What he truly aimed was to ensure the support of his community to a common agenda of the oppressed sections; this would enable the Ezhavas to stay in the lime light.

Madhavan had taken steps to ensure the participation of more than 6 lakhs of Ezhava community in the movement. In this venture Alumoottil family took the lead. On 2 January 1919 a grand meeting was held at the residence of Alumottoil Channar. This meeting was called as the Civic Right Meeting, attended by more than 500 people and presided by Komelezthu Kunju Paniker. A paper titled 'Travancore Government and Ezhavas' was presented in this meeting by the law college student, M.K. Kunju Panikar. The editor of *Keraleeya Abhimani*, P. Jacob, spoke on Civic Right Equality. Resolutions were adopted asking the government to abolish untouchability and unseeability. Resolution demanding temple for all Hindus was also passed.

Similar meetings were held elsewhere in Travancore, especially in the strong holds of Ezhavas. Meetings were held at Karthikapally under the auspices of *Muttam Vinjana Vikasini Library* on 1 January 1919. In Kollam, Ashramam *Sarada Stree Samajam*, conducted the gathering on 5 January 1919 and in Kottayam it was convened by the prominent Ezhava organisation, *Achandrathara Prashobini Samajam*. In Shertalai it was organized by *Karppuram Ezhava Samajam*, the strongest among Ezhava organization in Travancore. Similar meetings were held at Edamon, Perinad, Anchal, Vengalavattom (Punalur), Tannermukkam and Paravoor. In many places local Ezhava *Stree Samajams* (women's organization) took the initiative.¹⁵²

In the historic 15th sessions of SMPA (1919) the demands of the Civic Rightists debated threadbare. This session started on 17 February 1919 lasted

¹⁵² *Desabhimani*, 11, 18 & 25 January 1919.

for 10 days. A galaxy of leaders from various communities participated in this session. The session witnessed heated debates as separation of land Revenue from Devasawm came for discussion.

Before entering into details of the debates in this regard, one thing which arrests our attention is, the conspicuous silence kept by the members representing the Pulaya and Paraya communities in this issue. Ayyankali, the all time great leader of Pulayas and Kurumbran Daivathan represented Pulayas; while Raman Chonnan represented Parayas. The major demands of Pulayas and Parayas were regarding land question. Raman Chonnan urged the government to take special effort in awarding *Puthuval* lands (newly cultivated land) to his community. As he was unable to read his submission it was done by a Paraya student, Vth standard scholar from Thiruvalla Malayalam School. Similarly Ayyankali and Kurumbran Daivathan demanded for dwelling sites. It is heartening to hear the pleadings of Kurumbran Daivathan in 1921, the issue still unresolved, 'We are like forest animals as we don't have a small piece of land to bury our beloveds. What ever little bit of lands given to us are in the hills'.¹⁵³ Even today, after nine decades, their condition remains same. Print and electronic media regularly report the sad plight of the Dalits in Kerala, who are forced to bury their beloveds inside their small huts for want of spare land.

We cannot expect them to be vocal in issues like government employment and freedom of movement as they are denied the basic need of human beings. This also reveals how the process of modernization and democratization of society have been perceived by different communities. The entire debate on separation of Devasowm and Revenue was centered on the question of the democratic rights of the people in a civilized society. But it is clear that it was differently perceived by different communities.

¹⁵³ *Proceedings of the SMPA 17th session* – 1 March 1921.

The Ezhava community was represented in this session by stalwarts like N. Kumaran Asan, T.K. Madhavan, Muloor S. Padmanabha Panicker, N.R. Krishnan, A.K. Govindan Channar and V.R. Kochunni Vaidyar. Separation of the Devaswom and Land Revenue was sought even by caste Hindu members for different reasons. Devan Vasudevan Namboodiri, (Member, Land Holder Division, Kottayam) contended that Thasildars and Division Peischars had very little time to devote to Devaswom matters.

A highly illuminating presentation was made by Eapen Ghee Varghese, (Member, Mavelikkara Taluk) who stressed the social value of Civic Right Movement. He also mentioned the role of Pulayas and Parayas in the movement. It is for the first time the name of Pulaya and Paraya communities, who were supposed to be the part of the movement, were strongly mentioned in connection with CRM. He argued that every citizen had the right to know and criticise the management of any department. To get justice to the majority the only course open was to separate the Revenue from Devaswom department. He further observed that a progressive government should always respond to the advanced views of the reformers and if it was not done, dangerous results would likely to follow.¹⁵⁴

T.K. Madhavan, the Ezhava nominated member demanded separation of the two departments from the angle of self respect. The exclusion non-caste Hindus and non Hindus from certain departments on caste grounds was a matter of grave concern. As civic equality had been accepted as the order of the day every department should be thrown open to all castes, he observed. He also urged the government that employment in Nair Brigade should be open to all classes. Dewan replied that since the matter related to religion and as such government could not interfere in that matter. He added that even if government issued orders abolishing '*Theendal*' (pollution), it could not be enforced. Here T.K. Madhavan cited the experience of Japanese Government

¹⁵⁴ *Proceedings of the SMPA 15th session, 1919* (9th Day- 26 February 1919), pp. 87-88.

where it was enforced by a government order. Dewan argued that these social evils would disappear only gradually and it would take time. Again T.K. Madhavan insisted that if the government possessed the will it could be implemented as in Japan.¹⁵⁵

T.K. Madhavan maintained that the disability of Ezhavas was due to 'pollution' and the laws of caste which had been detrimental to forge Hindu unity. According to him caste oppression was the chief reason behind the exodus from Hindu religion. T.K. Madhavan was not the first in raising the issue along this line. It was the caste Hindu newspaper of the same name; *Desabhimani* published from Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, expressed identical argument citing the Japanese experience as far back as 1909.¹⁵⁶

The next prayer of T.K. Madhavan was that all classes of Hindus should be allowed free access to Hindu temples and he also cited a recent ruling of the High Court, which declared that the entry of some Ezhavas into temple was an act of defilement that caused serious concern among the community. Madhavan also contended that if the present state of affairs continued it would lead to gradual conversion of Hindus to Christianity and Islam and this would result in severe fall in the number of Hindus.¹⁵⁷

Kumaran Asan and N.R. Krishnan again highlighted the other social disabilities of Ezhavas, particularly the difficulties in school admission of Ezhava students. Kumaran Asan eloquently presented the issue as he had done

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁶ *Desabhimani* (Telugu Newspaper), 31 December 1909, NNPR, TNA, Chennai.

¹⁵⁷ *Proceedings of the SMPA 15th session, 1919*

In 1918 some Ezhava youths of Kadakkavoor in Chriayinkizh taluk entered into Subramanya temple, owned by a Namboodiri family and criminal case was initiated against them. The court punished the Ezhava youths, as they were found guilty. Court found that actions of the Ezhava youths were caused defilement since they are untouchables. Entry of an Ezhava into a caste-Hindu temple definitely injured the religious feelings of Nairs and Brahmins. The Travancore court issued the verdict on the basis of the Madras High Court verdict in 1885. For Madras High Court verdict see P. K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 194-210.

in the previous sessions.¹⁵⁸ The SMPA session came to end on 27 February 1919. N. Kumaran Asan extended the gratitude of Ezhavas towards Maharajah and eulogized him in the most glowing terms as was done in the previous session. High sounding adjectives were used, often deifying the king, clearly showing the veneration and submission to the royal authority. In this regard no community was an exception.¹⁵⁹

The debates and discussion held on the floor of the SMPA bore no desired effect. Civic Rightists on the other hand intensified the propaganda. E.J. John, T.K. Madhavan and others took initiatives and played lead roles in the agitation. Local committees of Civic Right League were formed in different parts of the state.¹⁶⁰

Mass meetings became a regular affair and a working committee was formed on 20 March 1919 with John Chandy as President. The working committee decided to hold a huge meeting on 5 April 1919 (23 *Meenam* 1094 *M.E*) and wide publicity had been given to this meeting. A notice for this meeting was widely circulated. The title of the notice was *Travancore Civic Right League's Grand Meeting* (see the notice in Appendix I). The mammoth meeting was held as programmed and it became a grand success. This meeting was presided over by E.J. John and T.K. Madhavan spoke on the occasion. Highlighting all aspects of the agitation, T.K. Madhavan observed, 'It is indeed a shame in this 20th century, the people of *Dharma Rajya* have to cry for equal civic rights. Even though government accepts our demand as just, it has not positively responded so far'. He further said that 'Our efforts are not in the proper direction' and argued that civic right equality should not be projected as a claim, on the other hand, it should be raised as the total aspiration. He used the

¹⁵⁸ *Proceedings of the SMPA 15th session, 1919*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁹ *Proceedings of the SMPA 15th session, 1919*, 10th day 27 February 1919.

¹⁶⁰ C. N. Somarajan and S. Sivadasan, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

word *Matam* (opinion) and urged to work till one's last breath and must adopt proper and justifiable paths to achieve the rights. He repeatedly cautioned not to resort to unconstitutional methods.¹⁶¹

T.K. Madhavan moved the first resolution in the meeting, it reads 'a memorial should be presented to the government and if needed, to the authorities concerned requesting civic rights should be granted to the citizens of Travancore'. This resolution was unanimously adopted and decided to present as a memorandum to Dewan during the next session of SMPA to be held in February 1920.

The campaign intensified in various parts of Travancore. There were meetings held all over and resolutions had been passed for the separation of Land Revenue from Devaswom. As the campaign gathered momentum there were differences of opinion surfaced between Christian leadership and T.K. Madhavan regarding the method to be adopted to carry out the struggle. Right from the beginning Madhavan stood for constitutional methods to achieve the end. He had unconsciously imbibed the mode of the nationalist struggle led by Gandhiji. It was by that time Jallianwala Bagh pogrom occurred and the consequent developments in the national political scene caused huge impacts. Gandhiji started Non-Co-operation Movement and his meteoric rise in the Indian political scene might have influenced Madhavan. At this stage in no way was he able to establish contact with the nationalist leadership. But at the same time his overemphasis on constitutional methods as the mode of struggle, can be viewed as a clear indication of either his transformation or the internal conflict.

A pamphlet titled 'Caste and Citizenship in Travancore' was published by Civic Right League, Kottayam, sometimes towards the end of 1919. This pamphlet contains the proceedings of CRL meeting held at Kottayam 5 April 1919. This pamphlet was highly helpful in creating awareness about the aims of

¹⁶¹ *Desabhimani*, 12 April 1919.

Civic Rightists among the general public.¹⁶² In this pamphlet, E.J. John, who presided over the meeting, lamented that the Civic Rightists were not showing enough enthusiasm on the question of getting employment. He concluded his observation by quoting the words of the previous Dewan P. Rajagopalachary (1907-1914), 'I cannot help you in any way unless you continue your struggle in lawful ways'.

Desabhimani stressed the need for constitutional methods to be resorted to in the agitation. It found fault with E.J. John and fixed the responsibility on him for not observing legally sanctioned methods in the struggle. The difference between Ezhavas and Christians surfaced here, though not consciously. Through out the agitation Christian sections very often registered their protest vehemently and sought various means to redress the grievances. Nazrani Deepika continuously published editorials and reports which helped a long way to boost the morale of Christians, in a way different from Desabhimani. M.K. Kumaran attests the lead role of Christians in the CRM and he explains how the movement estranged the Nair community very much similar to the way Malayali Memorial estranged the non-native Brahmins earlier. But CRM was opposed both by Nairs and Brahmins as they feared that it would endanger the interests of the nation and the efficiency of civil service.¹⁶³

The Travancore Catholic Congress actively participated and played a leading role in the movement which often assumed radical and extreme proportions. Tariath Kunji Thomman travelled the length and breadth of Travancore and made flamboyant speeches.¹⁶⁴

Desabhimani on the other hand urged all to observe constitutional methods in the agitation and it eulogized the President of the CRM, John

¹⁶² Confidential File No. 544/1921, KSA, Tvm

¹⁶³ M. K. Kumaran, 1987. *R. Sankar* (Biography of R.Sankar – Mal) Trivandrum, 1987, p, 32.

¹⁶⁴ John Kachiramattom, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

Chandi, who took a moderate position.¹⁶⁵ Madhavan believed that extreme step would destabilize the nation. He did not want the Ezhavas, a major constituent of Hindu population in Travancore to be part of any process which would pose threat to Hindu religion. At the same time it carried out a vigorous campaign to uphold the CRM. Allegations were leveled against those newspapers including *Desabhimani* that stood for CRM. It was alleged that supporters of CRM had been propagating communal disharmony among the various sections of the Travancore. *Desabhimani* carried a report giving precaution in this regard.¹⁶⁶

Now it became very clear that the struggle for Civic Right caused considerable threat and concern to the vested interests, which enjoyed power and position for centuries. The malicious propaganda unleashed by the opponents of the movement and counter arguments offered by the Civic Rightists was certainly the turning point in the history of Travancore.

Caste Hindu Newspapers started a vigorous campaign against CRM, particularly by *Veerakeralan* and *Subhashini*. They unleashed a hatred campaign, invited even prosecutions from the government. The articles published in this regard were highly provocative and intended to create animosity between various communities. *Subhashini*'s attack was venomous, directed against the Madras Governor Wellington who asked better treatment to the Christian subjects, for which he used the words 'the subjects of religion to which I and my wife belong'. Following the speech of Wellington, *Subhashini* published a highly provocative article titled. '*Janum Ente Patniyym Ulpedunna Matavum, Hindu Devaswapaharannavum* (The religion to which I and my wife belong and the spoliation of Hindu Dewasoms) It is a diatribe on Christianity and indirectly claimed that the property of Hindu Devaswom belonged to Nairs

¹⁶⁵ Editorial, 'Paura Samathwa Prasthanam' (Civic Right Movement), *Desabhimani*, 20 December 1919.

¹⁶⁶ *Desabhimani*, 'Paura Samathwam', 10 January 1920.

and Malayali Brahmins.¹⁶⁷ Open and unashamed tirade on Christianity and its missionary activity started in Travancore during the period of CRM, vigorously continued later. The torch bearers of this campaign were Hindu organisations and their leaders.¹⁶⁸

In a different context during the same period T.K. Madhavan also made a veiled attack on Madras Governor for his remarks. This was done in an editorial in which he said temple entry was nothing but a civic right of Ezhavas. Madhavan always made the temple entry demand as inseparable and inalienable part of CRM.¹⁶⁹

Regarding agitation, though enthusiasm was in the air, the mood was not upbeat. Apart from meetings, conferences and awareness campaign, there was no massive agitation. This was mainly because of the mode of struggle selected by the Civic Rightists. It was under tremendous pressure from T.K. Madhavan, who both in his capacity as the leader of Ezhava community and the editor of a powerful weekly newspaper, always wanted the agitations to be led strictly under constitutional methods. It did not give room for any spontaneous actions by the masses. This cast its influence in the outward manifestations of agitation. Overtly there was no momentum visible and this situation had been interpreted by caste Hindu sections and their press as lack of people's interest in Civic Right agitation. Desabhimani countered that the outward calm was not due to lack of public interest but because of the utmost

¹⁶⁷ Confidential File No. 569/1921, KSA, Trivandrum.

The provocative articles published by *Veera Keralan* were 'Ito Dharma Rajyathinte Stithi' (Is this the condition of Dharma Rajya?), 28 *Edavam* 1096 M.E (12 June 1921) and Thiruvitamkoorile Araajaka Sanghom (The Anarchist Organization of Travancore), 18 *Karkkidakam* 1096 M.E.

¹⁶⁸ R. C. Das and Amsi Narayana Pillai, 1936. *Christian Missionarimar Ini Namukkavare Venda* (Christian Missionaries, We Don't Want Them Any More), Trivandrum, Arya Publishing House, pp. 5-9 and 15-27.

The authors were respectively the Joint General Secretary and the Treasurer of Hindu Mission, Travancore.

¹⁶⁹ Editorial, 'Amarthi Pidichal Kuthichu Chadum' (If Suppressed It Will Burst Out), *Desabhimani*, 26 February 1921.

restraint and careful avoidance of any non-peaceful method by the agitationists. T.K. Madhavan demanded a favorable decision from the government. He urged the government to take concrete and immediate steps in view of the ensuing SMPA session. Madhavan also expressed his gratitude towards the gesture of Dewan for the government's willingness to receive a deputation of Civic Rightists during the SMPA session.¹⁷⁰

T.K. Madhavan and Desabhimani addressed the question of civic right on ethical basis, the value embedded in religion. But the spirit of the movement was very often run against the fancies of T.K. Madhavan though he was able to influence it a lot. In Travancore the numerical minorities always enjoyed power and position. The majority was minorized in terms of power and employment, and this was legitimized by the values of religion.

The 16th session of SMPA started on 23 February 1920 and it was widely held that Dewan would receive the Civic Right delegation on that day, but it was received only on 27 February 1920. The inauguration of the session began with Dewan's customary address which was basically an overview of the achievement of government in the previous year. Dewan was totally silent on the issue of civic rightists' demand, contrary to his earlier promise. Desabhimani criticized Dewan's stand and termed government's position on school admission as a blatant lie. Government clarified that no complaint was received in that particular year from the oppressed castes regarding school admission. Desabhimani highlighted many such incidents and complaints in this regard and hoped that the government in its meeting with the Civic Right delegation would give a satisfactory reply.¹⁷¹

Civic Right delegation met Dewan, Mannath Krishnan Nair on 27 February 1920 (*16 Kumbham 1095 M.E*). The leaders in this delegation were

¹⁷⁰ Editorial, 'Paura Samathwam' (Civic Right Equality), *Desabhimani*, 31 January 1920.

¹⁷¹ Editorial, 'Sree Moolam Praja Sabha' *Desabhimani*, 28 February 1920.

E. Jacob John, John Nidhiri, K.C. Mammen Mappilai, Tariath Kunji Thoman, Kunjunni Anthrappar, M.M. Varghese, John Chandy, J. W. Ross, K. I. Kocheeppan Mappilai, Kanakkalil Thomas, Jacob Kurien, T.K. Madhavan, Oorilethu Kunju Panikar, Khadar Pillai, Rev. J.I. Abraham and Father N.K. Skaria.¹⁷² E. Jacob John introduced the deputation members to Dewan and T.K. Madhavan read the Memorial and Khadar Pillai handed over the memorandum to Dewan. The persons took part in these deliberations represented different social forces and it symbolized the unity and solidarity of Christian, Ezhava and Muslim communities.

The memorial covered the signatures of more than 26 thousand people representing the population of over 26 lakhs. The memorial went beyond the demand for mere separation of two departments but squarely demanded equal rights and privileges in public service, free accessibility in public institution and the removal of untouchability.¹⁷³

The meeting was not fruitful and far from satisfactory. Dewan said the government was seriously considering the separation to which E. Jacob John observed that the reply was not different from the earlier one. The delegation urged a more definite reply. Dewan replied that more definite and satisfactory reply could not be given at the moment and the deputation expressed its dissatisfaction. It met at the residence of Jacob John to chalk out future programme.

Civic Right Movement entered in to a new phase after the delegation met Dewan. In Trivandrum town itself a branch of CRL was started. K.C. Eapen and V.P. Sivaraman were the leaders in Trivandrum. Similar

¹⁷² *Kerala Kaumudi*, 8 March 1920

¹⁷³ C. N. Somarajan and S. Sivadasn, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-66.(For full text of the Memorial see pp. 84 - 86, Appendix I) and also in K.K. Kusuman, 1976. *Abstention Movement* Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, PP. 89-92 (Appendix I)

branches also started in Attingal and other places. The editor of *Keraleeya Abhimani*, Jacob Kurian was authorised to tour all over Travancore to propagate the message of CRL. Some commercial ventures were named after CRM. *Paura Samathwa Workshop* (Civic Right workshop) was one such venture. These were similar to the instances during the *Swadesi* movement in the wake of partition of Bengal. Civic Rightists greeted others by saying *Paura Samathwa Vandanam*, a greeting similar to good morning and good evening.

T.K. Madhavan envisaged that if the government refused to accept the demands, struggle would end up in incidents like Jallianwala Bagh. So he cautioned the government to act according to the situation and wanted to see things with eyes opened.¹⁷⁴ T.K. Madhavan introduced the concept of sathyagraha in CRM and he popularized it. The forms of struggles of nationalist movement deeply attracted Madhavan. He mooted the idea of Satyagraha and an organization named Tiyya Passive Resistance League was formed in a meeting of Ezhavas. This meeting was held in Calicut on 18 October 1918 to discuss the grievances of Ezhavas of Cochin, and to take appropriate action to meet the challenge. Madhavan's leaning became very clear, though he was not in any way associated with Indian National Congress. To Madhavan this was a period of transformation and internal conflict.

As decided immediately after the unsuccessful meeting with Dewan, CRL conducted a huge meeting in Trivandrum at LMS Hall on 2 March 1920 at a time when the 16th session of SMPA was going on. E. Jacob John presided over the meeting and the hall was packed to capacity. T.K. Madhavan, Barrister K.R. Padhmanabha Pillai, Changanasseri Parameswara Pillai, S. Subramanya Iyer MA, BL and Jacob Kurien spoke on CRM and legislative council reforms. Changanassari Parameswara Pillai stressed the issue of temple entry, as one of

¹⁷⁴ *Desabhimani*, 'Divanji Avarkalude Murupadi' (Reply From Honourable Diwan), 3 April 1920.

the major demands of CRM. The meeting was a huge success. Subsequently the CRL met at Kottayam and resolved to continue the agitation. It also decided to hold a large gathering on 27 April 1920 or on a convenient date and Jacob Kurien was appointed as the Secretary of Civic Right League.

The Civic Right issue rocked the 16th session of SMPA also. T.K. Madhavan and Dewan locked horns in this session, started on 23 February 1920. N. Kumaran Asan spoke on social and political disabilities of Ezhavas and particularly on the hardship encountered by Ezhava students in getting admission in schools. He highlighted the issue of *Theendal* (pollution). He wanted to remove the *Theendal Palaka* (notice board) and urged the government to take immediate remedial measures so as to get access as far as the outer walls of temples.¹⁷⁵ This speech triggered a long but hard debate between Asan and Madhavan. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

T.K. Madhavan spoke on 3 & 4 March 1920, first on a different subject; he elaborately discussed the necessity of a Central Research Laboratory in Travancore to contain the epidemic diseases.¹⁷⁶ T.K. Madhavan spoke on the demands of CRL and offered practical suggestions to redress the grievances of depressed classes. He invited government's attention to the land question and asked the government to follow the scheme adopted in other states like Mysore and Baroda for backward classes. He asked the government to abolish *Theendal* and said 'the continuous observance of *Theendal* would drive the already suffering section of His Highness Maharaja's subject to despair. As Hindus, they are entitled to be treated on an equal footing with others, and otherwise they are likely to renounce their religion, that would seriously affect the numerical strength of the Hindus'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ T. K. Ravindran, 1972. *Asan Social Revolution in Kerala, A Study of His Assembly Speeches*, Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, pp. 70-76.

¹⁷⁶ *Proceedings of SMPA 16th Session*, p. 99.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

It is very clear that Madhavan was worried on the question of numerical strength of Hindus. All issues of civic right and social equality were finally brought in the realm of religion and seen in the backdrop of the broad interest of Hindu religion. The Dewan did not offer anything positively contrary to expectations. T.K. Madhavan vigorously attacked the stoic posture of government. He said it was deplorable that the government had taken a rude and unsympathetic position on a vital issue like this.

He repeatedly attacked Dewan's position on the question of untouchability, who said government is 'absolutely helpless'. This absolute helplessness, according to Madhavan is a blatant infringement on the rights of the lower castes. Madhavan finally pleaded for Civic Rightists' demands and he more than once questioned 'absolutely helpless' position of the government, but Dewan did not change this wordings. Government stand was clear, not to interfere in the customs, thus causing untold miseries to majority population in Travancore.

Madhavan recalled Dewan's attitude when the CRL delegation met him. Dewan asked the press representatives and reporters to leave the hall and only after that discussion with the delegation started. Madhavan asked why the government was so particular in keeping the press at dark. He added that government's intention was clear that it didn't want to settle the issue in a democratic fashion.¹⁷⁸

Madhavan's speech at SMPA echoed the aspirations of the communities concerned and it proved that he was the arch champion of press freedom. No other member raised the issue in this manner. The threadbare analysis of Dewan's reply shows T.K. Madhavan's quality as a seasoned leader and also as

¹⁷⁸ *Desabhimani*, 3 April 1920. (This debate was not found in the official proceedings of SMPA).

an ace politician. He argued for the importance and necessity of press freedom which he considered as the pre condition for the meaningful function of a democratic society.

The agitation continued and this prompted the government to appoint Krishna Iyengar, Forest Settlement Peischar to study and report the issue of separation of the two departments. He recommended separation of all government and private Devaswoms from land Revenue department including charitable institutions. Dissatisfied with this report, the government appointed a six member committee including official, non-official, Hindu and non-Hindu members. The terms of references of the committee were to consider the issue of separation of administration of *Sirkar* (Government) Devasowms and *Oottupurah* (Free feeding Houses) from the control of Land Revenue department. The committee submitted its report recommending the bifurcation of the two departments, with a dissenting note of P.K. Narayana Pillai, during the month of February 1921.¹⁷⁹

The committee in its report observed on the point dealing with the feasibility of separating Devaswom from the Revenue department.

As regards this point, the late Dewan Mr. Gopalachariar, in his reply to one of the representations in the third session of SMPA stated it was not possible ----- . He then added that from tradition, prestige and authority, the Revenue Department seemed to be the best fitted to manage the religious and charitable institutions. It is true that the supervision, control and management of Devaswom has been so interwoven and built into the fabric of Revenue

¹⁷⁹ *Report of Devaswom Separation Committee, 1921.*

Committee was appointed by the government vide G. O. No. D. 952/1920, dated 3 April 1920. The constitution of the committee as follows. Official Members: K. Anantha Narayana Iyer, Dewan Peischar, Kottayam (President) R. Krishna Pillai, Dewan Peischar, Quilon and John Kurien, Executive Engineer, Kottayam. Non official Members. P. K. Narayana Pillai, High Court Vakil, Kottayam, John Nidhiri, High Court Vakil Kottayam & Member of Travancore Legislature Council (Secretary) and Sanku Iyer, Acting Stationary Magistrate, Parur.

Department, that, during the past 100 years and more, the structure has attained such a solidity that any attempt at its demolition and the segregation of the one from the other will be inevitably attended with considerable difficulty labour and cost. But it cannot certainly be said that such a measure is not feasible or impossible of attainment. The question would be whether the labour and cost which the separation may involve would be justified. Our answer is in the affirmative.¹⁸⁰

The report further emphasized the need for administrative change in tune with changing political and social situation. It further added that the separation would relieve the Taluk *Thasildar* from the over burden and things will be in better position to look after the Land Revenue matters more efficiently.

Government accepted the recommendation and effected the bifurcation and issued orders published in gazette as extra ordinary dated 12 April 1922.¹⁸¹ The government resolved to separate *Sirkar* Devaswoms with effect from the *1 Chingom 1098 ME* (September 1922) and appointed Raja Raja Varma (Efficiency Audit Officer) as Devaswom Commissioner.¹⁸² The expenditure on Devaswom and Oottupurahs recorded slight decrease in the year 1921 – 22.¹⁸³

The press in Travancore on the whole welcomed the government's decision and extended kudos to Dewan for favourably considering the demands of the unprivileged castes and non Hindus, pending for a long period. Some anticipated that sooner or later temples would be thrown open to all Hindus.¹⁸⁴

Thus an arrangement instituted by Munroe in 1812 A.D came to an end. Munroe brought Devaswom under Revenue department for better government

¹⁸⁰ *Report of the Devaswom Separation Committee*, 1921. P. 17

¹⁸¹ *Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore*, 1929. Vol.V, Trivandrum, Government Press, p. 329.

¹⁸² *TAR*, 1921-22, 'Religion and Charitable Institution, Devaswom', p. 105.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.105. In 1920-21 expenditure of Devaswom was Rs/- 14,142,55 and in 1921-22 it came down to Rs/- 13,066,26 (- 107629) Expenditure of feeding institutions in 1920-21 was Rs/- 357971 and in 1921-22 it came down to Rs/- 350 454 (-7517).

¹⁸⁴ *NNPR*, 1922, TNA, Chennai.

control and to tame the unlimited powers of temple authorities. But in Travancore the government control meant the control of upper castes. They got absolute control over two departments, Devaswom and Revenue, the nerve centers of power. This came to an end and that was indeed most profound.

T.K. Madhavan held the view that Ezhavas supported the demand of separation of Devaswom from Revenue not because the Ezhavas had no right to enter into Devaswom department but to facilitate the entry of non Hindus like Christians in the Revenue department. He also held that as Hindus, Ezhavas had every right in Devaswom and that whatever rights caste Hindus enjoyed must be made available to Ezhavas also.

T.K. Madhavan took stock of the separation committee report and analysed both majority and minority views on separation. Both agreed on separation but differed on the rationale behind it. Both also agreed that Devaswom must be maintained and its expenditure should be met from public fund, but differed on its reasons. Majority were of the opinion that Travancore was a Hindu state and as such religious institutions should be maintained by public funds as similar norms were followed by other civilized countries. It also opined that it was the duty of the government to protect Devaswom both on religious and ethical grounds. Narayana Pillai held that it was to be maintained by public fund since it was the duty of the government by law and not by religious ground. It was foolish to think that Travancore government would protect Devaswom forever on religious grounds, since religious conditions were influenced by political policies.¹⁸⁵ It is indeed policies and programmes of any government are based on its politics. The importance of politics determines the social and individual aspects life. Partha Chatterjee brilliantly observed, 'the

¹⁸⁵ *Report of the Devaswom Separation Committee, 1921.* (Minority Report of P. K. Narayana Pillai), pp. 43-60.

determination of identity would once again become related to the political condition in which truth is produced'.¹⁸⁶

T.K. Madhavan argued that Devaswom property should be protected on the basis of legal and not by religious consideration. He added that if the government wanted Hindu religion to get any benefit from Devaswom that should not remain the exclusive property of caste Hindus and all Hindus must get the right of temple entry.¹⁸⁷

The success of civic right agitation is considered as historic. It is the first major trajectory to the course on which Travancore was moving. The civic right movement was largely responsible for the evolution of the present civil service system in Kerala and for its characteristic features including measures protecting social justice. The success of the movement should not be viewed merely in terms of victory of the oppressed castes in getting appointments that were previously denied. The real aspect of the victory was it offered a directional change in the political course of the country. The movement heralded many agitation in Travancore through which the modern history progressed. This makes Travancore fundamentally different from other parts and so the available tools of modern Indian historiography is not adequate to situate its modern history. Amazing change was brought by CRM; a declared Hindu state succumbed to the pressure of oppressed castes. Precisely that change has been brought by the Civic Right Movement.

T.K. Madhavan's intervention has elevated the status of CRM, as it transcended the original agenda. For Madhavan CRM had become a testing ground to translate his ideas into practice. The specific demand of a community had been shouldered by 26 lakhs; including non-Hindus this became possible by the work of Madhavan.

¹⁸⁶ Partha Chatterjee, 2004. *A Princely Imposter? The Kumar of Bhawal, Secret History of Indian Nationalism*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, p. 54.

¹⁸⁷ *Desabhimani*, 'Devaswom Vibhajana Committee' (Devaswom Separation Committee), 20 August 1921.

Ezhava Community in Flux 1917-24

Temple Entry: Negotiating Caste, Religion and Nation

‘On matters of politics I am an Indian Swarajist and
on matters of religion I am a Hindu’ - T.K. Madhavan¹

The demand for temple entry by the Ezhavas in Travancore which began towards the close of 1917 was a marked deviation in the history of Sree Narayana Movement (SNM). The complexities and conflicts that raged the community during this critical period (1917-24) decisively influenced the making of the community. This part of the study tries to unravel the flux undergone by the community and the serious impacts it had upon Ezhavas and the course of modern Kerala history.

The agitation for temple entry of the Ezhavas under the charismatic leadership of T.K. Madhavan forms a trajectory in the history of SNM. The value sphere of SNM was always rooted in problematizing the social conditions existed in Kerala and never bothered with the nationalist aspirations of the anti-British struggle. The demand for temple entry altered the priorities of the struggle for the civil rights including the freedom to use public roads etc. which had not yet been resolved by this time. The other eventful and multidimensional development, the conversion surge among the Ezhavas assumed more significance which led to a compelling situation to the leadership of temple entry to negotiate both with the national movement and also with their own caste and Hindu religion. An investigation into the interrelationship between temple entry demand with its ideological underpinning and other trajectories affected the community of the period in question reveals tremendous complexities of the process of community formation of Ezhavas.

¹ From T.K. Madhavan's reply speech, on receiving a panegyric at the special meeting of North Travancore *Sahodara Sangham* in Shertalai on 29 March 1926. (Full text see in Appendix II)

A process of interrogating or abandoning the Hindu religion had been set in among a section of the non-caste Hindus, who considered Hindu religion as the root cause of caste oppression. Though Narayana Guru and the SNM had not openly flouted Hindu religion they always covertly attempted to establish a distinct identity, which very often called the national movement and Hindu religion into question. Partha Chatterjee argues that the principle which constitutes the subaltern identity is contradictory to the religious beliefs and practices of caste Hindus and subordinate castes.² The SNM never reconciled this contradiction openly, but the caste-Hindus always conceived this contradiction as the basis of their identity. These positions of caste Hindus were always pointed out by leaders like C. Krishnan, K. Ayyappan and later by E. Madhavan (*Swatantra Samudayam*) in their attempts to homogenize the Ezhava community differently. Narayana Guru, the ultimate rallying point of Ezhavas accommodated both Krishnan and Ayyappan. Tracking the radical aspect of the SNM some held that the Guru himself tried to develop and propagate religious values and worship patterns different from those of Brahmanic influences.³ Sometimes the identity assertions themselves turned into a process of securing them positions within the religion. 'Ezhavas even when they agitated for the right to enter the state owned Hindu temples, they did so as a matter of basic human right as a way of getting accepted in the Hindu society rather than from any great desire to go to the temple'.⁴

The flux during the period (1917-24) did not occur all at once, but were present through out the long process in which Ezhavas were trying to assert themselves as a community. But during this period an extreme deviation in the form of attempt to solve the disabilities of community through establishing

² Partha Chatterjee, 1992. 'Caste and Subaltern Consciousness' in Ranajith Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies, Vol.6*, Delhi, Oxford University Press (OUP), pp. 169 -207.

³ Chandra Mohan, 'Popular Culture and Socio-Religious Reform, Narayana Guru and the Ezhavas of Travancore', *Studies in History* (3-1) 1987, New Delhi, Sage Publications, pp. 57-74.

⁴ Cyriac. K. Pullapilly, 'The Ezhavas of Kerala and their Historic Struggle for Acceptance in the Hindu Society', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* XI, 1-2, 1976, pp. 30-31.

itself within the Hindu religion took place. This facilitated not only the change of course of the negotiation with Hinduism but also enabled the community to directly address the national movement representing the nation. In Travancore among the Ezhava community this stream was represented by T.K. Madhavan, following the footsteps of the reformist position of various *Samajs* of North India; *Brahma Samaj*, *Arya Samaj* and *Prarthana Samaj*. Except in subtle niceties all these organizations agreed that caste discrimination posed a barrier to imagine the nation. The linkage between reformist organizations and the 'nation' is finely analysed by Susan Bayly.⁵ M.S.A. Rao argues that the agendas of all the reformist organizations in India were not radical and far reaching as that of SNM. The issues taken up by the North Indian reform movements nearly centered on the problems related to upper castes only.⁶ The engagement of SNM was totally different from that of North Indian reform organizations. The demand for temple entry altered this basic premise of the Narayana Movement. SNM, which was advancing with an agenda totally different from that of national movement, got assimilated with it and the Kerala society got deflected from the path through which it was developing.

What T.K. Madhavan tried to do was to place the demand for temple entry on an extremely different footing. He compared it to the struggle of the nationalists against the British, but at the same time distinguished it from that struggle. He observed that if for the nationalists the British hegemony was political slavery, for the Ezhavas who were denied temple entry; it was political and communal* slavery. He said that Travancore was a double prison to the Ezhavas. Liberation from political slavery would ensure political rights and

⁵ Susan Bayly, 2005. 'Caste and Modern Nation: Incubus or Essence' in *Caste Society and Politics in India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (CUP), pp. 144–86.

⁶ M.S.A. Rao, 1979. *Social Movements and Social Transformation*, Madras, Macmillan, p. 7.

* *Communal*: It is not used in the sense of communal or communalism as in modern day discourse. Today it denotes the alleged antagonistic contradiction between the followers of different religion. It is used here to connote the activities of the Ezhava community.

equal rights as citizens. But in Travancore the Ezhavas were also under social slavery and they were denied religious rights as Hindus.⁷

Madhavan believed that the national movement imagined various sections of the people to constitute a nation state. He thought that likewise the demand for temple entry would enable Ezhavas known in various sub caste names to form a single community. This would not only eliminate the internal differences that hinder the formation of the community as one unit, but the establishment of the right to enter the temples would also help to create the consciousness that the whole Ezhavas constituted an integral part of Hinduism. Madhavan thought that if it was possible to form an independent nation through anti-colonial struggle then the struggle for temple entry would be helpful to create an *Ezhavality* that was unified, independent and free from slavery. As the Indian National Congress could rise to an undisputed and leading force in India's political landscape, in Travancore the SNDP Yogam could rise as a force to reckon with through the agitation for temple entry. Thus he equated the Ezhava demand for temple entry with the anti-British struggle led by the national movement and the SNDP Yogam with Indian National Congress. This appropriation of T.K. Madhavan regarding the temple entry question of Ezhavas opened dialogue and engagement with national movement.

Madhavan who tried to identify the SNDP Yogam as an organisation engaged in a political struggle that was wide and at the same time capable of absorbing the differences, basically employed the same methodology of the national movement. He clearly understood how the political climate in India had changed when Gandhiji intervened in the political landscape of India in 1915. It can be seen that Madhavan adopted the Gandhian modes of struggle, of course, with certain exceptions. Till 1922, Madhavan did have some objections to Gandhian method of political struggle. Yet he literally followed the method

⁷ Editorial, 'Utaravinu Sesham' (After the Order), *Desabhimani*, 25 June 1921.

later, which imagined the whole Indian Hindus as a single entity through the elimination of untouchability, and thus made the Indian nation possible. His attitude towards the national movement after the withdrawal of Non Co-operation Movement had undergone drastic changes mainly due to his meeting with Gandhiji in September 1921. Madhavan attempted to don the cloak of Travancore Gandhi and this was revealed through these changes. Perhaps there was no other leader in Travancore except Madhavan who had recognized the undercurrents of Gandhiji's role in transforming the Congress into a mass movement. 'Madhavan believed that there is nothing beyond Gandhiji and Congress in the world'.⁸

In the beginning of 1920's when the surge for religious conversion was once again gripped the Ezhava community for various reasons, Madhavan took it as a challenge and was determined to face it. It is proper to view his demand for temple entry as a practical working model that he thought could effectively stem the tide of conversion. The demand for temple entry gained momentum as the conversion attempts among the Ezhavas became vigorous. Madhavan believed that the Ezhavas would not achieve social mobility by discarding Hinduism and vehemently opposed any move by the Ezhavas to leave Hinduism. T.K. Madhavan recognized that the arguments put forward by the leaders who wanted Ezhava community to get out of Hindu religion to confront the state of slavery had enormous potential to take the community in to an explosive situation. Madhavan could raise the demand for temple entry as a device to contain this situation effectively.

Indian National Congress had placed itself in the anti-British struggle and wanted everyone to recognize it as the sole representative of all sections of the Indian people. Similarly Madhavan was trying in the 1920's to transform the SNDP Yogam so that it would represent politically and otherwise all sections of

⁸ P.K. Balakrishnan, 1954, Rpt. (2000). *Narayana Guru* (Mal), Thrissur, Kerala Sahitya Akademy, p. 236.

the Ezhavas. He chalked out a course of action to reorganize the SNDP Yogam. T.K. Madhavan pursued his conviction and plan of actions despite strong opposition from leaders like K. Ayyappan, who declared 'I serve my country through my community'. Ayyappan also made scathing attack on those who opposed community representation.⁹

Madhavan relied on the activities of Indian National Congress and the national movement in order to mobilize hundreds of thousands of Ezhavas (6.5 lakhs) in Travancore and to make them assert communally. It is, in fact, an attempt to raise the Ezhavas and the SNDP Yogam to the level of the national movement. However, such a linear analysis can only interpret his activities as mere forethought, or as some thing that would prepare his community for a bright future. But those who problematize the national movement and the Congress cannot but also see the drawbacks of this paradigm. The national movement that systematizes the internal difference, and identities, and at the same time relocates them from the mainstream discourse as a result of powerful political impact, is no doubt a force that unifies the various Hindu identities and represents them politically. Though Madhavan adopted the methods of struggles of the national movement for the advancement of the community as a whole, it remains as a major weakness that he could not foresee the fact that the difference, maturing identities, and communities would not be able to escape from it. Traditional values are reinforced by redefining the cultural features in which caste Hindu domination made possible in the changed circumstances which Clifford Geertz calls as 'symbiotic strategies'.¹⁰ Madhavan's activities proved supportive to the integration of renaissance movements with national movement. And this greatly influenced in changing the course of modern history of Kerala.

⁹ K.A. Subramaniam, 1973. *Sahodaran Ayyappan* (Biography – Mal.) Cochin, K.A. Subamaniyam, pp. 121–123, and K. Ayyappan, 'Saddesiyam' (Mal.) Book Reviewed by Solomon, *Vivekodayan*, 1968 March- April, Book No. 2, Issue No. 3 & 4, pp. 121 – 123.

¹⁰ Clifford Geertz, 1973. *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York, Basic Books, p. 230.

The name T.K. Madhavan epitomises the demand for temple entry of *Avarnas* in Travancore. 'It is T.K. Madhavan who laid the foundation of temple entry agitation and anti-untouchability campaign'.¹¹ But the idea of temple entry for Ezhavas was first publicly pronounced not by an Ezhava but by a Nair, C. Raman Thampi,¹² a High Court advocate at a meeting held in connection with the 60th birth anniversary celebrations of Narayana Guru on 1 September 1917 under the auspices of an *Ezhava Samajam* in West Kollam. But this contention was countered by M.S.A. Rao¹³ on the basis of an article written by K.R. Narayanan.¹⁴ P.K. Madhavan, the biographer of T.K. Madhavan¹⁵ and N. Kumaran also endorsed that the idea was first mooted by Raman Thampi.¹⁶ Moreover a look into the whole proceedings of *Alapuzha Ezhava Yuvajana Samajam*'s special conference held at Sanadhana Dharma School (Beasant Hall) Alleppey on 25 December 1918 also attest the fact that it was Raman Thampi who publicly pronounced the idea of temple entry for Ezhavas. Moorkoth Kumaran who attended the conference observed that T.K. Madhavan himself admitted this fact.¹⁷

In this meeting Raman Thampi observed that the social inequities experienced by the Ezhavas must be resolved immediately. The only defect he found in Ezhavas was that they engaged in toddy business. According to him except this there was no difference between Nairs and Ezhavas. The color of

¹¹ Mannath Padhmanabhan, 1964. *Ente Jeevitham Smaranakal* (Reminiscence of My Life), Vol. 1, Trivandrum, N.S.S. Press, pp. 109 – 110.

¹² Mahadev Desai, 1937. *The Epic of Travancore*, Ahmedabad, Navajeevan Karyalay, p. 10.

¹³ M.S.A. Rao, *op.cit.*, pp. 58 – 59.

¹⁴ K.R. Narayanan, 'Vaikathu Nadannittulla Ayithochadana Shramangal Oru Thirinja Nottam' (A Look Back in to Anti -Untouchability Efforts in Vaikom), *Vivekodayam*, Special Issue, September 1968, Book No.2, Issue No.7, pp.185–91.

Author narrates different incidents in the direction of eradication of anti-untouchability – [Dalawakulam Massacre (1803), Talayolparambu Riots (1921), Poothotta Satyagraha (1924), and Vaikom Sathygraha (1924)]. These incidents had nothing to do with the temple entry.

¹⁵ P.K. Madhavan, 1936. *T.K. Madhavante Jeeva Charitram* (T.K. Madhavan's Biography), Vol.I, Trivandrum, Sarada Book Depot., p.100.

¹⁶ N. Kumaran, 'SNDP Yogam Chila Smaranakal' (SNDP Yogam Some Memories) Quilon, *SNDP Yogam Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (hereafter called, SYGJS), 1953, p. 57.

¹⁷ *Desabhimani*, 'Oru Maha Pothu Sammelanam: Alappuzha' (A Grand Public Meeting in Alleppey), 28 December 1918.

Ezhavas, the position of tuft (*Kuduma*) and community customs were all same. But this tuft proved to be a misfortune for Ezhavas in Boothapandi. During the festival season in Boothapandi, temple roads were forbidden to Ezhavas and other non-caste Hindus. Braving the ban Ezhavas gathered in the temple road during the festival in the year 1919. Some local authorities invited these Ezhavas to pull the chariot being unaware of their caste identity. The officers mistook them as belonging to upper castes after seeing their tuft. On knowing their identity the local upper caste people assaulted the Ezhavas and a terrible situation developed in which the local police stood by the Nairs.¹⁸ The English educated progressive sections among the upper castes were fully aware of the danger of division among Hindus, especially between the prominent castes. This might have prompted them to argue for temple entry of Ezhavas.

In Travancore the debate on temple entry triggered after the famous editorial appeared in *Desabhimani* on 15 December 1917 (*IDhamu 1093 M.E.*).¹⁹ The editorial was actually drafted by C.V. Kunjuraman and sent to *Desabhimani* immediately after the public address of C. Raman Tampi in Quilon on September 1917. This left idle in *Desabhimani* office for nearly two months. N. Kumaran recalled that, 'its owner Kayyalakkal Padhmanabhan was quite reluctant to publish it, fearing the repercussion'. Finally the management sought N. Kumaran's advice and he asked to publish it.²⁰ T.K. Madhavan while addressing the famous meeting in Ochira on 21 November 1926 observed that, the temple entry claim in Travancore had been started through the editorial published in *Desabhimani* on 15 December 1917 (*I Dhamu 1093 M.E.*).²¹

¹⁸ *Mitavadi*, 'Boothapandiyle Kshetra Pravesanam' (Temple Entry in Boothapandi), March 1919, pp. 117 – 19 & *Desabhimani*, 1 February 1919.

¹⁹ Editorial, 'Kshetra Pravesanam' (Temple Entry), *Desabhimani*, 15 December 1917.

²⁰ N.Kumaran, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

²¹ T.K. Madhavan, 'Kshetra Pravesana Vadathinte Charitram Oravalokanam' (The History of Temple Entry Demand an Analysis), Kottayam, *Vaikom Sathyagraha Commemoration Volume* (hereafter called VSCV), Vaikom Sathyagraha Golden Jubilee Committee, 1977, p. 41.

The editorial asked the Ezhava members who were nominated/ elected to Sree Moolam Popular Assembly (SMPA) to move resolution urging the government that Ezhavas be allowed entry in all government Hindu temples. The editorial anticipated support to this demand from Nairs and expected no opposition from Malayala Brahmins. Utter naivety prevailed in this part of the editorial. The reader of the editorial may be taken aback on the observations regarding Brahmins. One can't consider this as a strategy to pool support of the upper caste Hindus either. The most orthodox sections of the Hindu fold did not consider the lower castes even as human beings. '*Mlechas* are nothing but faint and distant phenomenon at the horizon of indigenous tradition'.²² The editorial grossly deviated from the earlier position of SNDP Yogam on British Raj. Once SNDP Yogam unequivocally declared 'if we are going to rule India by ourselves we will be going back the same distance that we have advanced during the last 150 years of English rule'.²³ Now it hails the decision of British government 'that it will not interfere in the religious matters', a decision announced after the revolt of 1857. The editorial reposed faith and confidence in the ruler of Travancore and it asked the Ezhavas not to plunge into conversion.

The faith and confidence reposed in past by the editorial is a clear strategy to contain the prevailing emotions of the Ezhava masses. Anthony D. Smith brilliantly observes 'there are number of dimensions of useable past. The first is that history serves the interest of others who use selected aspects of past to manipulate mass emotions'.²⁴ At the outset we can say the editorial is a simple and plain demand for temple entry of Ezhavas, but its undercurrent negates the Ezhava assertions in many ways. Its faith in Brahmins and on the concept of Sree Padhmanabha is nothing but a negation of Ezhava identity.

²² Wilhelm Halbfass, 1998. *India and Europe, An Essay in Understanding*, Albany New York, State University of New York Press, p. 187.

²³ *Vivekodayam*, October 1907 (*Thulam 1083 M.E*), Book No.4, Issue No.7, pp. 4 – 5.

²⁴ Anthony D. Smith, 2004. *The Antiquity of Nation*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p. 212.

This editorial is a clear indication towards the vision and perspective of T.K. Madhavan in temple entry agitation.

Contextualizing the Demand for Temple Entry

The year 1917 sensed the beginning of the downfall of caste Hindu patronage and the rise of the new self directed Dalit movement. The context was the political turmoil of 1917-20, when almost all communities were being mobilized around the issue raised by Montague- Chelmsford reforms. The immediate issue was who would represent untouchables, but the implications were to be much more profound.²⁵ In 1917, the ruler of Baroda, Sivaji Rao Gaekwad convened an All India Anti-untouchability conference at Bombay in which resolutions demanding temple entry of Avarnas were adopted.²⁶

In Travancore the biggest bombshell was exploded in May 1917 in the form of inter-dining (*mishrabhojanam*) organised by K. Ayyappan (1889-1968). Ayyappan organized a meeting in Thudira Parambu near Cherai, his native place on 29 May 1917 in which some Ezhavas dined with Pulayas. The account of this revolutionary incident has been vividly given by his biographers; K.A. Subramaniam²⁷ and M.K. Sanoo.²⁸ In fine details of the event there are differences of opinion among the biographers of Ayyappan. Pointing out the discrepancies in these details, recently a monograph has also come, which refutes some contentions of M.K. Sanoo.²⁹ All these accounts highlight the historical significance of the event which caused the biggest shock to the savarnas and also to the Ezhava leadership who kept faith in Hinduism.

²⁵ Gail Omvedit, 1994. *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, New Delhi, Sage, p.144.

²⁶ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

²⁷ K.A. Subramoniyam, *op.cit.*, pp. 16-19.

²⁸ M.K. Sanoo, 1989. *Sahodaran Ayyappan (Mal)*, Kottayam, D.C. Books, pp. 63 – 66.

²⁹ M.V. Subramaniam and M.B. Nanu Thampi, 1999. *Mishra Bhojana Bhoomiyil Nilkumbol* (In the land of Inter-Dining), Parur, Gurudeva Kdumba Unit, pp. 1-16.

Terrible repercussions were witnessed all over Kerala. The hue and cry against Ayyappan and his movement turned violent in many places. In one such incident Ayyappan himself was physically assaulted. Elite Ezhavas showered abuses on Ayyappan and called him 'Pulayan Ayyappan'. One of the prominent Ezhava Samajams in Cherai, *Vinjana Vardhini Sabha* ostracized Ayyappan and others who participated in the interdining from the community and this lasted for next ten years.³⁰ C. Krishnan hailed Ayyappan but Kumaran Asan cautioned the Ezhava youths and urged them not to plunge in to dangerous activities.³¹ In another incident the orthodox Ezhavas even filed a civil case against some Ezhavas in which Narayana Guru was also included. The case was filed in Parur Munsiff Court in 1924; the charge was defilement against Narayana Guru as he entered the Kalikulangara Ezhava temple along with some Pulayas.³²

In an another important incident in Kozhikode, defying the prohibitory orders of Thoran, the Collector of Zamorin of Calicut, C. Krishnan along with Manjeri Ramaier walked along the roads leading to Tali temple in Calicut on 1 November 1917, (Notice Board/ *Theendal Palaka* was planted, prohibiting the entry of Avarnas through the roads) after giving prior notice.³³ The impact of this incident in Malabar was similar to the impacts of inter-dining organised by Ayyappan in Cochin. Manjeri Ramaier heavily criticized the Brahmins for their outdated custom and he observed 'such Brahmins are dead beyond resurrection'.³⁴

³⁰ M.V. Subramaniyan and M.B. Nanu Thampi, 1999. *op.cit.*, p. 30.

³¹ K.A. Subramoniyam, *op.cit.*, p. 19 and M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

³² M.V. Subramaniyan, (Compiled) 2002. *Pathinezham Prati Narayana Guru Swami Ennu Koodi Paranju Varunna Ezhupathu Vayasumullah Nanoo Asan. Sree Narayana Guru Prathiyaya Oru Kodathi Nadapadiyude Charitra Rekhakal* (17th accused Nanoo Asan, aged 70, alias Narayana Guru Swami: Documents of the Court Proceedings of a Civil case), Parur, Gurudeva Kudumba Unit, pp. 1 – 18.

³³ K.R. Achuthan, 1971. *C. Krishnan* (Biography, Mal), Kottayam, Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sanghom, pp. 85–86. Also see, Changaram Kumarath Sankaran, 'C.Krishnan', *Vivekodayam*, Special Issue, January 1968, Book No.1, Issue No. 1, pp. 143 – 146.

³⁴ Manjeri Ramaier, 'Theosophy and Liberal Brahmanas', *New India*, 29 March 1917.

The actions of Ayyappan and Krishnan heavily influenced the protagonists of temple entry movement in Travancore. They were compelled to raise the demand of temple entry for Ezhavas. Ayyappan had strong conviction that without smashing caste, social liberation of Ezhavas could not be achieved and to smash caste he believed the only option was to have inter caste marriage and inter caste dining. Within a short span after the high profile inter caste dining, Ayyappan became an icon of the radical Ezhava youths.³⁵ Antonio Gramsci's description of organic intellectual excellently befits Ayyappan. 'These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong'.³⁶ C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar wrote 'he was an intellectual to the level of great genius, similar to that of Socrates who influenced generations' thought and their action. At the same time Ayyappan has shown the practical ways to make their lives successful.³⁷ Ayyappan himself observed that inter dining was intended to annihilate the caste and Kumaran Asan's criticism surprised him.³⁸

The first wave of conversion among the Ezhavas and the riots occurred between Nairs and Ezhavas immediately after the second session of SNDP Yogam (1905) had strong impacts. This situation experienced some lull due to slow but reluctant steps initiated in favour of Ezhavas by the Travancore government. But the persecution of Ezhavas by Nairs continued sporadically. By early 1910's again a number of riots broke out between Nairs and Ezhavas in Travancore on account of forceful extraction of cash or kind from Ezhavas to meet the expenditure of temple festivals. Ezhavas openly declared their

³⁵ P.K. Balakrishnan, *op.cit.*, pp. 242 – 43.

³⁶ Antonio Gramsci, 1947, Rpt. (1996). 'The Problems of History and Culture' in *Selections From the Prison Note Books*, Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell (ed. & Trans.) Chennai, Orient Longman, p.3.

³⁷ C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar, 1995, *Palpu Muthal Mundasseri Vare* (From Palpu to Mundasseri), Kottayam, D.C. Books, 1995, pp. 33 – 35.

³⁸ K. Ayyappan, 'Mishra Bohojanam' (Inter Dining), *Sohodaran*, September 1917 (*Kanni 1093 M.E.*), Book No. 1, Issue No. 1, pp 5 – 7.

decision not to extend any kind of co-operation to temples where they had no accessibility. This form of non-co-operation was observed not under the directives from the Ezhava leadership. The decision was taken and carried out spontaneously in most places. This non co-operation, though very much non-violent in its form proved to be the most revolutionary method. The census report of 1911 tellingly showed the decrease of Hindu population in Travancore. Kumaran Asan, the General Secretary of SNDP Yogam categorically stated the reason behind the decrease in Hindu population. It was the government policy and the oppression of the upper castes that forced Ezhavas and other non-caste Hindus to embrace other religions.³⁹

Temples: Forms of Challenge and Response

In one of the incidents in Poonjar near Kottayam more than three hundred not so poor Ezhava families decided to convert into Christianity in 1911-12. This is supposed to be the single largest conversion of Ezhavas prior to the temple entry demand. Incidentally this event is not mentioned in any work relating to the social history of modern Kerala. *Vivekodayam*, the official organ of SNDP Yogam expressed its deep anguish and sorrow over the decision of the Ezhavas of Poonjar and appealed them to refrain from the move.⁴⁰

The immediate provocation of the exodus was the non-compliance of the order of local Raja of Poonjar Kovilakom, who asked the Ezhavas to provide firewood to the Kovilakom temple in connection with the festival. The Ezhavas who supplied the firewood to the temple used to collect it from the nearby forests. On this occasion due to various government measures which restricted encroachment on forests they were unable to provide firewood and the matter

³⁹ N. Kumaran Asan, 'Hindukkalude Vardhana Kuravu' (Missing Growth of Hindu Population in Travancore), *Vivekodayam*, October 1912 (*Thulam 1088 M.E.*), Book No. 9, Issue No. 7. pp. 220 – 25.

⁴⁰ *Vivekodayam*, June - July 1912 (*Mithunam- Karkkadakom 1087 M.E.*), Book No.9, Issue No. 3 & 4, pp.113 – 14.

was communicated to the king. Dismissing the plea, he ordered to confiscate the documents of the lands which belonged to Ezhavas and asked the officials to issue orders making the supply of firewood to temple as mandatory. Moreover the officials were instructed to extract more taxes from the Ezhavas. In this situation the Ezhavas were left with no other alternative but to convert into Christianity.⁴¹ S.K. Sankoo, who was deputed by SNDP Yogam to enquire and report the situation, requested the SNDP Yogam to send Sadhu Siva Prasad Swami immediately to Poonjar area for delivering religious lectures as a remedial measure to stall the conversion move. It is interesting to note that in 1916 Sadhu Siva Prasad left the Sanyasi fold and urged Sree Narayana Guru to establish a new religion or Ezhavas be allowed to adopt Buddhism. In this regard Deshabhimani strongly deplored Sadhu Siva Prasad.⁴²

The Poonjar incident shows the magnitude of caste oppression suffered by Ezhavas. Similarly in many places the tension between the upper castes and Ezhavas resulted in attempts of conversion by Ezhavas. The uneasy situation prevailed in 1916 prompted SNDP Yogam to appeal to the community to dissociate with temple festivals like Shertalai Pooram and Kodungallore Bharani.⁴³ Riots occurred in Thiruvalla Kottai, in Aaranmula *Proverthy*. Here Ezhavas were assaulted on 31 November 1917 as they walked along the prohibited paths around the local Bhagavathy temple. In Kadakkarapalli at Shertalai taluk another riot between Ezhavas and Nairs occurred on 17 November 1917.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Extracts of the letter from S.K. Sankoo, Secretary Ezhava Samajam, Kottayam to N.Kumaran Asan, General Secretary SNDP Yogam cited in *Vivekodayam*, October 1912, (*Thulam 1088 M.E*), Book No. 9, Issue No. 7, pp. 214 – 217. On knowing the incident S.K. Sankoo was deputed to Poonjar by SNDP Yogam to obtain first hand information and report the matter to SNDP Yogam. He was deputed vide letter No. 3167 dated 17 August 1912 of the General Secretary SNDP Yogam.

⁴² *Desabhimani*, 17 March 1917.

⁴³ Resolution (No.7) adopted in the 13th Annual Conference, SNDP Yogam held at Ramavarma Club, Quilon on 11 and 12 May 1916. The resolution was jointly moved by T.K. Narayanan, then editor of *Desabhimani* and V.K. Padmanabhan, cited in *Desabhimani* 13 May 1916.

⁴⁴ *Desabhimani*, 15 December 1917.

The conversion moves were the spontaneous reactions of the Ezhavas in their respective areas but SNDP Yogam asked the people to remain within the fold of Hinduism. It urged the government to solve the social problems faced by the Ezhavas and warned that the very moment they leave Hinduism, they would achieve everything they needed. SNDP Yogam blamed the government for precipitating such a situation, which was totally uncalled for.⁴⁵ SNDP Yogam deputed Karuva Krishnan Asan to deliver religious lectures through out Travancore to thwart the conversion move.⁴⁶

It was against this background that the demand for temple entry of Ezhavas came into forefront and the debates were on after the famous editorial in *Deshabhimani* dated 15 December 1917. The personality of T.K. Madhavan, largely influenced by his family background deeply anchored in the cultural values of Hinduism was also instrumental in this regard. During this period T.K. Madhavan himself attended various religious meetings including the one conducted by Ramakrishnan Mission in Quilon. The personal diary of T.K. Madhavan attests his enormous interest in this meeting. On 4th and 5th December 1916 he was actively engaged in connection with this religious meet. 'Went in the morning to Dr. Lekshman's Bungalow and then had a talk with Swami Nirmal Ananda in which several people took part. It was a hot discussion. In the after noon also went there and attended the conversation classes'.⁴⁷ He participated in this affair despite his ill health, on which he had vividly mentioned in the diary on all these days. *Deshabhimani* carried an editorial on 'Brahmananda Swamikal', president of Sree Rama Krishnan Mission.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Editorial, *Vivekodayam*, 1905 July (32 *Mithunam* 1082 M.E), Book No.2, Issue No. 3, p.2.

⁴⁶ Editorial, 'Mata Prabhashanam' (Religious Lecture) *Vivekodayam*, October 1907 (*Thulam* 1083 M.E), Book No.4, Issue No. 7, p. 7.

⁴⁷ T.K. Madhavan, Personal Diary, 4, 5 and 6 December 1916, Researcher's Private Collection (Hereafter called RPC)

⁴⁸ Editorial, 'Brahmananda Swamikal', *Desabhimani*, 9 December 1916.

The activities of Rama Krishan Mission started in Travancore in 1911 and in next couple of years *Matoms* were established in Harippad and Truvalla taluks. Arya Samajists also started their activities in Travancore during this time. All these helped in unifying Hinduism, which spread over into different communities.⁴⁹ T.K. Madhavan had certainly been influenced by these organizations due to locational proximity.

SNDP Yogam Officially Takes up the Temple Entry Issue

SNDP Yogam in its 15th session, held in Kottarakkara on 7-9 May 1918 endorsed the resolution demanding entry of Ezhavas in government run temples. The original resolution was moved by T.K. Narayanan. It reads, 'Yogam demands Ezhava entry into all institutions and all places maintained by the government funds'. T.K. Madhavan brought an amendment to the resolution to include 'all government temples' and was unanimously adopted by the conference. This was for the first time that SNDP Yogam adopted a resolution demanding temple entry of Ezhavas.⁵⁰

The whole idea of temple entry was conceived by T.K. Madhavan as a pre-condition to the unity of Hinduism. Though Madhavan was not in any way connected with national politics at this time (1918-19) his desire to save Hinduism indirectly linked with the concerns of the nation. Later events clearly proved this. 'The success of new national community depended on the nationalist ability to mobilize the Hindu population'.⁵¹ Anthony D. Smith discusses the process of nation formation, particularly by analysing the methods and manipulations employed by B.G.Tilak. T.K. Madhavan was well aware of

⁴⁹ R. Narayana Panickar, 1993. *History of Travancore*, Trivandrum, Vallivilasom Publishing House, pp. 590 – 91.

⁵⁰ *Desabhimani*, 11 May 1918,

In this regard P.S. Velayudhan, the official historian of SNDP Yogam wrongly mentioned that the resolution was adopted in the 17th session (13 May 1920, Alleppey) See, P.S. Velayudhan, 1978. *SNDP Yoga Charitram* (Mal.), Quilon Ch. III p. 203, ff .20. At the same time he wrote that the resolution adopted in the 15th session, See, p. 210.

⁵¹ Anthony D. Smith, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

the mood of the Ezhavas who were ready to leave Hinduism to escape the continuous persecution. Poonjar incident was a telling warning, which worried Madhavan and he also feared that this would give an upper hand to radical section of the Ezhavas in the leadership. T.K. Madhavan believed that the temple entry of Ezhavas would lead to better relationship with Nair community, which he always nursed. T.K. Madhavan had an intense friendship with Mannath Padmanabhan, the Nair leader who organized his community in Travancore. Babu Vijayanath, T.K. Madhavan's son recalled the relation kept by Mannam towards Madhavan's family.⁵² Mannath Padmanabhan himself observed that, in temple entry struggle, Madhavan and he worked like '*Sree Rama Lekshmanas*'. He also criticized the Ezhava's alliance with Christians and Muslims in the Abstention movement. 'By this the base of Hindu unity had been wrecked and the victory song of temple entry came to an end'.⁵³

Desabhimani always advocated Nair-Ezhava unity and urged Ezhava community to observe restraint as and when riots between these communities broke out. This policy was assiduously practiced during the period of temple entry demand (1917-24). Madhavan in a speech at Kannamangalam categorically stated that the demand for temple entry of Ezhavas was to forge unity of Hindu religion.⁵⁴ Thus temple entry became a process to integrate Ezhavas into the Hindu pantheon. This enabled the Indian National Congress to tackle the Ezhavas in its fight against British rule.

T.K. Madhavan through his active intervention in the civic right movement reoriented its aim and agenda and brought the debate of temple entry claim of Ezhavas to the forefront. T.K. Madhvan's effort in the temple entry

⁵² Babu Vijayanath, Interview with the author at his residence, Keerikkad, Kayamkulam on 20 February 2005 and the public speech at YMCA hall, Trivandrum in connection with 75th death anniversary of T.K. Madhavan held on 30.02.2005. A.K. Antony, Union Cabinet Minister for Defence, Veliyam Bharghavan, Kerala State Secretary, Communist Party of India and the author were among the speakers in the meeting.

⁵³ Mannath Padmanabhan, *op.cit.*, pp. 135 – 137.

⁵⁴ *Desabhimani*, 'Oru Mahajana Yogam' (A Grand Public Meeting), 5 February 1921.

agitation of Ezhavas was duly attested in the report of Temple Entry Enquiry Committee.⁵⁵

Caste Hindu Response: Strategies and Concerns

At the outset the educated and progressive sections of caste Hindus clearly realized the significance of the demand for temple entry. They held the view that the realization of temple entry of Avarnas would save Hinduism from the imminent danger. But at the same time the orthodox section always wanted to keep the religion in its pristine purity for which they opposed any compromise. This section enjoyed more stakes over the communities they represented and as such it ran parallel to the interest of nationalists also. Print literature available in this period is a sufficient testimony to their opposition. They enjoyed hegemonic domination over others through their control in temples, which had enormous power. Temples considerably helped to strengthen the Brahmanic power. The temple committees held extra-ordinary powers as they had the power to summon and punish even the local kings.⁵⁶ 'Temple *sanketas* are considered as Temple Kingdoms', say surveyors Ward and Connor.⁵⁷ If thieves, dogs, Chandalas, outcastes and women in their menstrual period entered temple, purificatory ceremony (*Suddhikalasm*) had to be performed to regain the sanctity.⁵⁸ Ezhavas were classified as Chandalas observed Punnesseri Nambi Neelakanta Sharma, Principal Sanskrit College, Pattambi, who was the member of Temple Entry Enquiry Committee. He said that the government had no right to amend the procedures, well entrenched in holy texts.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee*, 1934. 'History of the Temple Entry Movement', pp. 47-48.

⁵⁶ R. Narayana Panickar, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

⁵⁷ P. Bhaskaranunni, 1988. Rpt.(2000). *Pathonpatham Nootandile Keralam* (Kerala in 19th Century) Thrissur, Kerala Sahitya Akademy, pp. 807-808.

⁵⁸ M.K. Ramachandra Rao, 'Report on Purifactory Ceremonies' in K.P. Padhmanabha Menon, *Kerala History*, Vol. IV, p.124.

⁵⁹ *Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee*, 1934. pp 190 – 91.

The journals run by Malayali Brahmans and upper castes regularly published articles against the demand. To vindicate their stand these articles carried excerpts from Hindu scriptures. A prominent Nair magazine *Navya Keralam* took strong exceptions to the demand of temple entry of Ezhavas. It observed that the government should not have taken control of the temples which resulted in such an unpleasant situation like temple entry claim of Avarnas.⁶⁰ In response to an article by C.V. Kunjuraman in *Kerala Kaumudi*, defending the demand for temple entry of Avarnas, 'Swrajya', the caste Hindu newspaper published from West Quilon took strong exception by using abusive languages. It said 'instead of giving temple entry they should be given blows'.⁶¹

When a Sanskrit teacher, who was a Nair, ventured in to the sanctum sanctorum (*Garbha Griha*) of the Thakazi Kandaringkavu Bhagavathy Temple, he was badly manhandled by the temple priest with the support of Nairs nearby. The Nairs also filed a criminal case against him alleging defilement in the 1st Class Magistrate Court, Alleppey.⁶² By custom Nairs were not allowed to enter into the sanctum sanctorum and pray by beating the bell (*Mani Adichu Thozhuka*).

Right from the beginning of 20th century, even outwardly progressive journals justified the customs and rituals based on caste. They justified the *Acharams* (customs) prescribed in the caste system.⁶³ The defenders of varna and caste system strongly opposed temple entry demand of Avarnas and held that the claim was totally baseless and against Hindu scriptures (*Shastras*).

⁶⁰ *Navya Keralam* (A Magazine for the Welfare of Nair Community), published by A.P.Nair, Mavelikkara, *Meenom* 1093 M.E (March 1918), Book No.1, Issue No. 3, pp. 75 – 77 & 86 – 87.

⁶¹ N.R. Krishnan, 1963. *Ayithochadanam Athava Kshetra Pravesanam* (Eradication of Untouchability or Temple Entry), Thuravoor, Narasimha Vilasom Book Depot., p. 106.

⁶² Editorial, 'Kshetra Pravesana Vadam' (Temple Entry Demand), *Navajeevan*, April – May 1929 (*Meenom-Medam* 1094 M.E), Book No. 3, Issue No. 8 & 9 pp. 225 – 228.

⁶³ Narayana Menon, 'Jaati' (Caste), *Vidyavinodini*, September 1901 (*Chingom* 1071 M.E), pp. 465 – 70.

They also attacked the Communists. 'The present movement of temple entry is inspired by men who have no faith or knowledge of our *Shastras* and who wish to work out Russian scheme of Bolshevism. This movement, nefarious, unscientific and unshastraic may perhaps please the prejudice of the Christian clique rather than anything else.... This diabolical interest which some non-temple goers today have taken in temple entry will only destroy the sanctity of our temple and convert them into mere museums, if they are successful'.⁶⁴

The caste Hindus who supported the demand were of the view that it was the only effective way to homogenize the Hindu community or else the Hindu religion would land in danger, it would be smashed by the onslaughts of Christian missionaries.⁶⁵ Another book on the same issue but interrogates the claim of *Sanatanis* and supports the demand of temple entry of Avarnas. This work also acknowledges the pioneering efforts of T.K. Madhavan in temple entry agitations.⁶⁶ It is interesting to note the observation of Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, which says 'the *Sanatanis* do not attribute conversion of Avarnas to other religion to their not being allowed to enter temples. There were many conversions before the temple entry question was rooted --- and conversion will cease when the social and economic position of Hindu Avarnas is improved'.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ K.A. Padhmanabhayya, 1947. *Kshetra Pravesanam*, Ernakulam, pp.5-6.

Though this observation was made later, it amply echoed the pulse of the orthodox Hindus during the period of temple entry demand of Ezhavas (1917 – 24).

⁶⁵ P.K. Narayana Pillai, 1927, *Kshetra Pevesana Vadam Athava Kerala Achara Naadi Pareeksha* (Temple Entry Demand or Pulse Examination of Kerala Customs), Quilon, Sree Ramavilasom Press, pp. 3-7.

[Narayana Pillai did this work, at the behest of T.K. Madhavan]

⁶⁶ V.Achutha Menon, 1933. *Kshetra Prevesana Vadam: Keralathile Sanathanikalkku Marupadi* (Temple Entry Demand: Reply to *Sanatanis* of Kerala), Quilon, S.R.V. Press, pp. 1-10 & 12-13.

⁶⁷ *Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee*, p. 62.

Temple Entry and Courts

In Travancore the entry of Avarnas into the temple was viewed as a crime as it was not legally sanctioned. The Travancore law courts always followed the verdict of the Madras High Court in 1885, which forbade the entry of Avarnas into the temple and held that it amounted to defilement. The verdict was pronounced by Justice Muthu Swamy Iyer on a case in which a goldsmith, offered prayer in a Siva temple in South Tamilnadu. Though the European Judge differed from the Chief Justice, the verdict was finally pronounced according to the readings of the Chief Justice. He observed that defilement should be taken as such as it was viewed by the Brahmins. Since then Travancore Courts followed the verdict of Madras High Court.⁶⁸

In late 1918 some Ezhava youths including three matriculates forcefully entered the Kadakkavoor Subramaniya temple in Chiryinkeezhu Taluk which belonged to a Namboodiri family. A criminal case was registered against them and the Travancore High Court punished them citing the verdict of Madras High Court.⁶⁹ In 1888 certain caste Hindus of Kayamkulam lodged a complaint to the government that the local temple was open to pollution because all classes of people were making use of the path running west to the temple.⁷⁰ 'The criminal law protects places of worship from defilement by making it an offence under section 295 of Indian Penal Code corresponding to the section 294 to Travancore Penal Code'.⁷¹

⁶⁸ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 194 – 210. (Dialogue with Acharya P.C. Roy at Kokkinada in December 1923 after the AICC session)

⁶⁹ N.R. Krishnan, 1937. *Smarananjali* (Life Sketches), Engandiyoor, Seena Publications, p.85. Also see P.K. Madavan, *op.cit.*, pp.111–112 and G.Priyadarsanan, Interview with the Author at his residence, Perettil, Varkala on 23 February 2005. Among the Ezhava youths convicted by the court for entering the temple, some of them were his relatives.

⁷⁰ Cover File 2751 / 1888, Kerala State Archives (KSA), TVM.

⁷¹ Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, pp. 34- 35.

The hegemony of Brahmins in the courts proved horrible to Avarnas, 'certain Brahmins, holding the post of Tahsildars, Sub Magistrates, Magistrates and Deputy Collectors allow their minds to be wrapped by caste prejudices and religious bigotry even while discharging their public duties'.⁷²

When a carpenter (*Kammala*) caused "pollution" to water tank owned by Savarnas, the owner performed purificatory ceremony and asked him to pay the expenses, the demand was rejected. The Savarnas sued him in a civil court and the complainant's claim was upheld. The accused Kammala appealed in High Court of Travancore, and the appeal was dismissed with costs and ordered to pay compensation. The prejudice of the Travancore Court was very clear; it observed 'the defendant a Kammala by caste could easily have foreseen that his bathing in the temple tank would be deemed polluting ----'.⁷³

But in some of the verdicts pronounced by the Travancore courts, it held the right to enter temple as a civil right. Here the difference is that both the complainant and defendants were upper castes. The protagonist of temple entry highlighted this to vindicate their stand. One such case occurred in 1897. In this case Vakji Jeraji, a merchant belonging to the *Bania* caste originally from Bombay Presidency who settled in Alleppey (Travancore) for business purpose entered Ambalapuzha Sreekrishana Swamy temple and this created a big uproar. The caste Hindus of the locality filed a case against him in the District Court of Alleppey. Upper castes contended that though he was a Hindu, he was not living according to the *Varnasharma Dharma* principles practiced in this part of Malayalam. But the verdict of the court went in favour of Vekji Jeraji. The Judge, M.K. Ramachandra Rao in case No. O.S. 6/1072 M.E, held that Vakji Jeraji was a Hindu and as such he was entitled to enter into a government temple. Government filed an appeal in Travancore High

⁷² *Vettikodiyan* (Tamil – 'One who carried victory flag'), 1 August 1891, *Native News Paper Reports* (NNPR), Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai.

⁷³ *The Travancore Law Journal*, Vol. IX, 1919, pp. 298 – 301.

Court, but the appeal was disallowed by the Chief Justice, Dewan Bahadur C. Vencobachariar and Justice Kunjiraman Nair on 10 October 1898 and directed the government to pay Rs.7500/- for the loss of reputation to Vakji Jeraji.⁷⁴

In another verdict the Travancore High Court upheld the verdict of Alleppey District Court, which squashed the decision of the 'Smartha enquiry' (*Smartha Vicharam*).^{*} The Smartha enquiry court found one Narayanan Kesavan guilty and as such he was declared out caste. An out caste had no right over his family property and he could not enter the temple. Narayanan Kesavan went to the court with the prayer to declare the decision of Smartha enquiry as not binding on him. Alleppey District Court pronounced its verdict in favour of the plaintiff Narayanan Kesavan. When government appealed in Travancore High Court, it was disallowed. In this regard the officiating Chief Justice F.J.R.V. Hunt observed that 'the right to enter a temple for the purpose of worship is a civil right which is vested in every member of a caste or community entitled to worship in such temple. The right is purely personal and gives a person whose right is infringed a remedy by way of a suit'.⁷⁵

In the above two cases the Travancore High Court ruled temple entry as a civil right. It is very interesting to note the fact that the Ezhava youths of Kadakkavoor were convicted for entering into a temple after these two verdicts.

⁷⁴ *The Travancore Law Reports*, Vol. XIV, 1899. Part II pp. 156 – 61. (Published by Authority, Trivandrum, Travancore Government, Printed at Western Star Press, Trivandrum, 1899).

^{*} *Smartha Vicharam* (Brahmanical Trail for infidelity). It was a custom among the Brahmins to try women suspected of adultery, by a team of learned Brahmins. The man or men involved in the case would also be summoned. This trial is known as *Smartha Vicharam*, The accused woman is called *Sadhanam* (Thing or Commodity). If the charge is proved the Brahmanical Court has the power to declare the women as well man as the out castes.

⁷⁵ *Travancore Law Reports*, Vol XXXI, 1915. pp. 113 – 117.

Temple Entry Agitation: Nuances and Ramifications

The demand for temple entry of Ezhavas very soon became the most debated social issue in Travancore since it involved factors of negotiations with caste, religion and the nation. As the demand gathered momentum under the leadership of T.K. Madhavan, a host of leaders within the community expressed reservation in pursuing the demand. It was not welcomed by Kumaran Asan, K. Ayyappan and C. Krishnan for different reasons. The magnitude of the campaign for temple entry led by T.K. Madhavan can be gathered from the kind of debates generated on it from within and outside the community.

Some sections criticized the Ezhava position as they did not allowed Pulayas in their temple, for which T.K. Madhavan replied that the government temples maintained by public fund must be thrown open to all. He said Ezhavas had every right and power to deny entry to Pulayas or even to Brahmins to their temples which were constructed by Ezhavas with their money and situated in their land.⁷⁶ Ayyappan though declared his solidarity with Madhavan asked '---- yet we would like to ask one thing to Mr. Madhavan, in how many Ezhava temples Pulayas are allowed and for that matter how many articles are published in *Desabhimani* to inspire the Ezhavas in this regard'.⁷⁷

While the campaign for temple entry assumed high velocity, Ayyappan and others tried to shift the terrain. He persuaded Narayana Guru to issue a message in which Guru asked the people not to encourage temple constructions and instead advised them to start educational institutions. He further said that

⁷⁶ Editorial, 'Samadarshiyum Ezhavarum' (Samadarshi and Ezhavas), *Desabhimani*, 27 July 1918.

⁷⁷ Editorial, 'Kshetra Prevesanam' (Temple Entry), *Sahodaran*, February – March 1919, (*Kumbham 1094 M.E.*), Book No. 2, Issue No. 1, pp. 3-4.

temple enhanced caste differences.⁷⁸ Narayana Guru himself founded temples at various places 'for lower castes to use with as much satisfaction as could be derived from worshipping in the established Hindu temples of Kerala. With this parallel net work of major shrines under his leadership the Guru seemed less enthusiastic than some SNDP Yogam organizers in pressing the authorities of the old temples to permit lower castes to enter'.⁷⁹

This message was not earnestly internalised by SNDP Yogam, and those who reconciled with this message remained in the fringes. Since the temple entry issue becomes the chief agenda, the terrain of discourse has also been changed. If temple entry agitation was conducted as a precondition to the freedom of movement or for other civil rights, it was certainly an action which integrated Ezhavas into Hinduism strongly.

The temple entry agitation reoriented the direction and mode of agitation of Ezhavas. T.K. Madhavan always wanted lawful means to be adopted in the agitation. The situation was different when Ezhavas asserted for freedom of movement and other civic rights. These agitations involved violence, as they had clashed with upper castes. Ayyappan observed, 'really the writings and speeches of temple entry agitators helped in keeping Ezhavas loyal to law, which would have been lost other wise'.⁸⁰

T.K. Madhavan unconsciously imbibed the values of caste-Hindu reformer's position on untouchability. They clearly took it as an aberration, which proved costly to the unity of Hinduism. These reformers deeply held trust in a re imagined caste system representing a moral social order that differentiated India from Western modes of social organisation marked by

⁷⁸ *Desabhimani*, 'Kshetra Nirmanathe Prolsahippikkaruthu' (Don't Encourage Temple Construction), 29 June 1918, (Message of Sree Narayana Guru).

⁷⁹ Charles Heimsath, 'The Functions of Hindu Social Reformers with Special Reference to Kerala', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XV, 1978, No. 1, p. 34.

⁸⁰ *Sahodaran*, March 1921 (*Meenom 1096 M.E.*), Book No. 3, Issue No. 11, pp. 402-403.

class and conflict.⁸¹ So to offer a counter model to Western system and to strengthen the caste according to *Varnashrama Dharma*, it needed certain modification, i.e. to do away with untouchability. The trap of caste and *Varnashrama Dharma* is still there and Madhavan's programme of temple entry never offered challenge to this predicament.

On temple entry question, any deviation from the part of community leaders met with stiff resistance from Desabhamani and T.K. Madhavan. He directly locked horns with V.R. Mammen Chohan, the reputed Ezhava leader in Cochin. A lucrative High Court advocate, Chohan tasted the wrath of T.K. Madhavan when he wrote a letter to Ambady Narayan Menon, expressing his displeasure towards, the demand of temple entry. The letter was published in '*Bhaje Keralam*', said 'while we the Tiyyas of Cochin claim equality of rights and privileges with other citizens of the state in all civic matters including the right of free passage through public highways, we don't desire to enter the temples of caste Hindus nor to bathe in their temple tanks. I have no sympathy with any of my caste men who claim in latter rights'. Desabhimani reproduced the letter from *Bhaje Keralam* and condemned Mamman Chohan in the harshest terms.⁸²

T.K. Madhavan and Kumaran Asan on Temple Entry

On temple entry issue T.K. Madhavan and N.Kumaran Asan stood in opposite directions. It is very interesting to note that both Asan and Madhavan subscribed same view on Hinduism and opposed conversion but clashed on temple entry issue. Asan easily found the linkage between the demand of temple entry of Ezhavas and the nationalist agenda. Asan was the last person to accept or support the struggle against the British Raj. He critiqued the

⁸¹ Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay, 2004. *Caste Culture and Hegemony Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal*, New Delhi, Sage, p. 67.

⁸² *Desabhimani*, 26 January 1920.

nationalist position and its processes of imagining communities for a unified nation. Asan foresaw the demand for temple entry would eventually lead to integration with nationalist politics. Though Madavan at this point of time was not associated with nationalist movement, the possibility of such an alliance was not remote. Kumaran Asan's apprehension turned to be prophetic.

Asan was branded as 'moderate' and T.K. was considered as an extremist in airing the demand of the community. Asan was treated as moderate as he was not for temple entry but he stood for civic rights only. After prolonged years of agitation for temple entry T.K. Madhavan, the 'extremist' himself backtracked from the demand for temple entry to freedom of movement by launching satyagrahas in Vaikom and in other places.

According to some writers Asan's endeavors were more helpful than Narayana Guru's efforts in saving Hinduism. Asan continued his opposition towards conversion through out his life. 'Ezhava labour should not be used for the construction of churches and viharas as they are already tired off laboring for constructing temples'⁸³ Asan asked Ezhavas to give up the illusion that they could gain social status through conversion which he considered futile and against the self respect of the community.⁸⁴

Kumaran Asan a strong critic of nationalist aspirations and the Indian National Congress always cherished community's liberation by gaining social freedom, and without which he believed there was no meaning in political freedom.⁸⁵ Similar issues are analysed in a study by T.K. Ravindran, 'though

⁸³ K. Prasobhan, 'Kumaran Asanum, Keralathile Samuhya Viplavavum' (Kumaran Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala) in G. Priyadarsanan (ed.), *SNDP Yogam Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, Quilon, SNDP Yogam Platinum Jubilee Committee 1978, pp. 137 - 38.

⁸⁴ Komelezthu K.G. Madhavan, 1976. *Asan Chila Yatharthyangal* (Asan Some Realities), Mavelikkara, Prathibha Printers, p. 106.

⁸⁵ M.P. Appan, 1993. 'Asanum T.K. Madhavanum' (Asan and T.K. Madhavan) in *Asanum Samakalikarum* (Asan and His Contemporaries), Collected Essays, Thonakkal, Trivandrum, Asan Memorial Committee, pp. 97 -98.

Asan was branded as moderate, he stood for more radical change than that of temple entry through his literary works'.⁸⁶

Kumaran Asan's speech at 16th session of SMPA triggered a controversy. He said 'there were a few matters yet which required looking into. *Theendal* (pollution) was one of them. Representation has been made more than once, still the prayer had not been granted. On the other hand, the notice boards, which had fallen or disappeared, were again put up in certain localities, prohibiting the use of such localities by Ezhavas and other backward communities. In South Travancore and North Travancore objectionable notice boards are still in existence, this not only prevented them from using certain public places but was also insulting to their self respect. He appealed the government to take immediate remedial measures and see that they got access at least as far as outer walls of the temple'.⁸⁷

Desabhimani in an article titled 'Kumaran Asan and Community Representation' made a scathing attack on Kumaran Asan. (The author's identity of the article was not revealed. The author's name is given as 'Community Lover' which according to M.P. Appan can be none other T.K. Madhavan).⁸⁸ The article severely criticized Asan's moderate stand on the issue of temple entry. It observed that Asan's action was against the aspirations and the well being of the community. It mentioned that he was also silent in Legislative Council on issues involving the rights of the community. The article asked 'is it because of his moderation he was silent'. It countered the argument of Kumaran Asan, who declared himself as moderate. The article asked 'whether the organisations like Indian National Congress, Nair Samajams and individuals like Raman Thampi, T.K. Velupillai, Malloor Govinda Pillai, Changanasseri Parameswara Pillai and even Narayana Guru, who supported the cause, are all extremists'?⁸⁹ On the one hand it challenged the position of Kumaran Asan in an irrational manner and on the other hand it appeased upper

⁸⁶ T.K. Ravindran, 1983. *Entineya Swarajyam* (Swaraj, for What), Trivandrum, Sahodaran Publications, pp. 60 – 61 and 44 – 106.

⁸⁷ *Proceedings of the 16th Session of SMPA*, 2 March 1920, pp. 107 – 108.

⁸⁸ M.P. Appan, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

⁸⁹ Samudaya Snehi (Community Lover), 'Kumaran Asanum Samudaya Pradhinityavum' (Kumaran Asan and Community Representation), Desabhimani, 20 March 1920.

castes and the Indian National Congress. Desabhimani attempted to mediate the demand for the temple entry of the Ezhavas through religion and nation. But E. Madhavan unravels the ulterior motive behind the co-operation of upper castes towards the demand of temple entry of Ezhavas.⁹⁰

In reality Kumaran Asan had forcefully pleaded for the cause of community in all sessions of SMPA in which he was a member.⁹¹ The differences between him and Madhavan intensified at a time when Asan stepped down from the post of General Secretary of SNDP Yogam and editorship of *Vivekodayam* in 1919. Asan indeed wrote a reply to the Deshabhimani article in *Prathibha*, the journal he edited since October 1919. He wrote

What I have said in my appeal is as follows, 'the right to temple entry of Ezhavas and others is now being debated. I have in many occasion much before the beginning of the demand, requested the government through this Assembly that there must not be any hindrance to use the public roads around the outer walls of temple and that the notice boards displayed in many places are prohibiting it. It ought not to be debatable point to person of any caste as a human being. Therefore before replying to the demand of temple entry this can be decided. This is my present request. It is noticed that old notice boards are being replaced by new ones even now. This is totally unwarranted, objectionable and extremely unjust. This is what I meant in the appeal. As it was an oral appeal I don't remember the exact words. But as I have enough knowledge of language there is no possibility of my making any mistake'.

In this reply he mocked the 'Community Lover' and sarcastically questioned his credentials. Kumaran Asan was unusual in attacking the author of the article. He concluded the reply 'Dear readers I do not usually use my pen in so harsh a manner as this. I had to pen these words obeying the dictates of my conscience and truly good intentions and above all my love towards the community. Please forgive me if I had been too harsh'. Deshabhimani reproduced this reply from *Prathibha*.⁹²

⁹⁰ E. Madhavan, 1934, Rpt (1979). *Swatantra Samudayam* (Independent Community), Trivandrum, Prabhath Book House, pp. 68 – 70.

⁹¹ T.K. Ravindran, 1977. *Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala A Study of His Assembly Speeches*, Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, pp. 48 – 79.

⁹² *Desabhimani*, 'Asante Durvyakhanam' (Asan's Misinterpretation), 29 May 1920.

Considering the speech made by Asan in the SMPA session, it may be right to infer that he was a moderate. But we are not sure whether in the particular context he implied the government temple or the temples exclusively run by upper castes. In an article in *Prathibha* he advocated a harder stand, wanted Ezhavas not to co-operate with upper castes who kept Ezhavas away from the public roads.⁹³ Asan also criticized Cochin government's stand on temple entry question. He said it was unfair and unacceptable that the government temples were being called as Hindu temples.⁹⁴ Asan's untiring work was instrumental in mobilizing the Avarna consciousness, on which the communist movement in Kerala benefited much. 'It borrowed and popularized Asan liberally because of his idea appealed to all oppressed people. Also, the single-most important reason why Ezhavas became the backbone of the Communist movement in Keralam is the background created by SNDP movement with its related cultural aspects'.⁹⁵

Desabhimani and T.K. Madhavan played a significant role to estrange Asan from SNDP Yogam. Madhavan consistently campaigned against Asan when his name was proposed to the first reconstituted Travancore Legislative Council.⁹⁶ Despite the opposition and engineered protest carried out by Desabhimani, Asan was nominated to the Legislative Council. He became the first Ezhava member nominated in the council. T.K. Madhavan stood for N. Kumaran.

Temple Entry Gathers Momentum: Crisis, Strategies and Consequences

Temple entry agitation gathered momentum since March 1920. The attempts so far in this direction did not bear any desired effect. Polarisation of

⁹³ *Prathibha*, September 1920 (*Kanni 1096 M.E.*), pp. 23 –24.

⁹⁴ T.K. Ravindran, *op.cit.*, no. 91, pp. 73 – 74.

⁹⁵ T.G. Jacob with P. Bandhu, 2002. *Reflections on the Caste Question: The Dalit Situation in South India*, Bangalore, NESAI, pp. 129 – 30.

⁹⁶ *Desabimani*, 7 February 1920 and 6 March 1920.

public opinion for and against temple entry became visible and sporadic violence between Ezhavas and upper castes occurred. T.K. Madhavan eloquently presented the temple entry issue in the 15th and 16th sessions of SMPA, but government did not take any positive step in this direction. Madhavan had to continue the struggle for temple entry separately as the civic right movement was extinguished by this time.

As the agitation for temple entry intensified, once again riots and conversion surge were witnessed in Travancore. This time the scale and magnitude of the riots were enormous and so was the case with conversion. Caste Hindus, particularly Nairs consolidated their effort this time in intimidating and attacking the Ezhavas and situations were very terrible in many places. Though T.K. Madhavan and his associates never wished for such a situation, things changed contrary to their expectations. In certain historical situations peoples' reactions go beyond the vision of their leaders which in turn creates history. Certain inherent qualities of Ezhavas got a suitable opportunity in temple entry demand, so they reacted accordingly.

In the all India level Non Co-operation Movement (NCM) launched by Gandhiji also slowly intensified. NCM (1919-22) considered as a major breakthrough in the process of nation making. In Travancore this movement had very little impact. On the other hand the movement of Ezhavas went on inviting large scale riots and conversions.

In the last week of March 1920 a terrible riot broke out between Nairs and Ezhavas in Padanayar Kulangara near Karunagapally, which lasted for many days and its impact reflected in many places. Here the Ezhavas did not co-operate with the temple festival but the upper caste people forcefully trespassed into Ezhava properties and looted their crops in the name of temple

festival. Local administration and police favoured the Nairs and tried to attach the properties of Ezhavas. This caused huge stir among the Ezhavas.⁹⁷

Padanayar Kulangara incident made a terrible impact in such way as to force T.K. Madhavan, the all time *Sanathana Hindu* to move a resolution favoring conversion of Ezhavas to Christianity. He did this at the behest of delegates from Karunagapally taluk, in the 17th session of SNDP Yogam held in May 1920. The angry Ezhavas rioted in many places. Radicals and intellectuals in the community strongly held the view that Ezhavas should abandon the Hindu religion.⁹⁸

Padanayar Kulangara Ezhava Samajam decided that Ezhavas in Padanayar Kulangara should enmasse convert into Christianity. The local Arya Samajam swung into action. Arya Samajam Secretary, Ayirror in Thiruvalla wrote a letter to the Ezhava Samajam Secretary urging him to abandon the decision. The letter dated 30 March 1920 vividly explained the excellence of *Arya Matam* (Hindu Religion) and condemned Christianity in maximum possible terms.⁹⁹ This clearly expresses the ideological hegemony of Hinduism through which it is able to control a population whom they oppressed.¹⁰⁰

The Ezhava Samajam Secretary sent his reply on 6 April 1920, brushing aside all the observations of Arya Samajam Secretary. The letter boldly declared their decision to convert and that there was no going back.

“We have decided to change. We don’t believe that we will get freedom and happiness in life if we remain in Ezhava caste. You consider us as fellow Hindus only to extract our hard

⁹⁷ Desabimani, ‘Padanayar Kulangara Smarakam’ (Padanayar Kulangara Memorial), 1 May 1920.

⁹⁸ Desabimani, ‘Mochana Margam’ (Liberation Path), 3 April 1920.

⁹⁹ Confidential File, 1630 / 1920, K.S.A. Trivandrum. Also see Desabhimani, 10 April 1920.

¹⁰⁰ Ursula Sharma, 2002, *Caste*, New Delhi, Viva Books, p. 48.

earned money. You have no objection to permit Ali Kunju and Koshi to see the temple festival along with you".¹⁰¹

The Samajam convened a meeting of the Ezhavas of the locality to know the pulse of the community in this regard. Among them a near total extended their willingness to join Christianity. The Arya Samajam Secretary reminded them that even if they converted into Christianity their condition would be the same as of the Indians in Africa. Interestingly this was the nationalist cry throughout the anti-British struggle that echoed in their campaigns. In Kerala, news papers with nationalist perspective also expressed this in the same nerve.¹⁰² But this was effectively countered by radical section of Ezhava leadership especially by C. Krishnan and others. C. Krishnan particularly attacked this campaign of the nationalists, as they were treating non caste Hindus in India worse than Britisher's treatment towards Indians in Africa.¹⁰³

Taking stock of the situation Ayyappan severely attacked Hindusim and its Gods and opposed Nair Ezhava unity. At the same time he cautioned about the Ezhava move for enmasse conversion to other religions, though it had justification.¹⁰⁴ His attacks on Hindu Gods have tremendous similarities with the Self Respecters of Tamil Nadu.¹⁰⁵

Riots were reported from many places, related with temple. In Sakthikulangara and Arattupuzha, Ezhavas experienced terrible intimidation on account of their non- co-operation with caste Hindu temples. It was against this backdrop that the historic 17th session of SNDP Yogam held at Alleppey

¹⁰¹ Confidential file, 1630/1920, ('Alikunju and Koshi, read as Muslims and Christians').

¹⁰² Editorial, 'The Kenyan Problem', *The West Coast Spectator*, Calicut, 10 July 1923, Regional Archives, Calicut.

¹⁰³ C. Krishnan, 'Presidential Address in the 22nd Annual Session of SNDP Yogam Karthikapally, 7 May 1925', *Desabhimani* 25 May 1925.

¹⁰⁴ K. Ayyappan, 'Matham Maattam' (Conversion), *Sahodoran*, May-June 1920 (*Meenam-Medam 1095 M.E*), Book No. 2, Issue No. 11 – 12, pp. 290- 94.

¹⁰⁵ V.Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, 1998. *Towards a Non – Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thas to Periyar*, Calcutta, Samya, pp. 334 – 349.

(Kidangamparambu temple ground, north of District Court Alleppey) on 13-14 May 1920. In this session T.K. Madhavan moved the resolution demanding entry for all Hindus in all public temples.¹⁰⁶ T.K. Madhavan was elected as Assistant Secretary of SNDP Yogam in this session.

The impact of Padanayar Kulangara incident was evidently reflected in this session. T.K. Madhavan, only once in his public life endorsed conversion and he moved a resolution at the behest of the delegates from Karunagapally taluk, favouring conversion. Resolution says, *Conversion will solve most of the social grievances of the Ezhavas as the government and the so called upper castes are not taking any satisfactory steps to alleviate the grievances of Ezhavas. This meeting is of opinion that the entire Ezhava community may take necessary steps to embrace Christianity.* This resolution was seconded by Anasthanathu Kunju Panciker, Kanakkode Kunju Sankarn Channar, and P.K. Panicker. It was opposed by N. Kumaran Asan, Erathu Krishanan Asan and K.C. Kunju Raman. Neutral stand was observed by C. Krishnan. T.K. Madhavan preferred voting on it.¹⁰⁷ The fate of the resolution was not available, most probably it would have been defeated.

It is indeed baffling that a person like T.K. Madhavan moved such a resolution. He could not have withstood the tremendous pressure put upon. This session also decided to admit all to the SNDP Yogam irrespective of caste and religious affiliation, subject to the new entry would not affect the right and privileges of the existing members. In that sense also this session proved historic.

T.K. Madhavan and Desabhimani relentlessly campaigned for temple entry. It gathered momentum as reports and clashes between Nairs and Ezhavas

¹⁰⁶ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.*, p.19, and *Desabhimani* 15 May 1920. (*Desabhimani* says it is the resolution No.8 as against P.S. Velayudhan mentioned it as resolution No. 19).

¹⁰⁷ *Desabhimani*, 15 May 1920.

on temple related issues, reported from across Travancore. In one such incident at Paravoor, a Nair succumbed to his injury and his companion was wounded seriously.¹⁰⁸ In Tiruvalla, some Ezhava students ventured into the road round to Mathilbhagom Vishnu temple, caused riot between Ezhavas and Nairs. Violence met with violence; there was a new found enthusiasm among the Ezhavas visible everywhere. This phenomenon was in contrast with the situations existed elsewhere in India. Gerrald Berreman who extensively studied Hindus in Himalayan region argued that caste oppression has a toll on the psyche. Untouchability causes stigmatized identity a source of suffering that the individuals deal with in the limited ways that are available to them.¹⁰⁹ On the contrary the stigmatized identity is not a bar to challenge the situation in Travancore, the riots tell so.

T.K. Madhavan, the ace editor invited responses from prominent personalities on temple entry demand of Ezhavas. George Joseph in a detailed analysis, wanted Ezhava community to capture the right not by abandoning Hinduism and finds fault with Madhavan's resolution in the Alleppey session. But he admits that conversion as an effective step to attain social liberation.¹¹⁰

Declaring unstinted solidarity with the demand for temple entry of Ezhavas, Changanasseri Parameswara Pillai urged all Nairs to co-operate with the demand. He said that even Nairs suffered discrimination in temples, so they must support Ezhavas.¹¹¹ Moorkothu Kumaran was out and out against this

¹⁰⁸ *Bhaje Keralam*, 5 June 1920.

(A Nair news paper published from Cochin and edited by Cheriya Kunjunni Achan).

¹⁰⁹ Gerald Berreman, 1979. *Caste and Other Inequities: Essay on Inequity*, Meerut, Folk Lore Institute. p. 171.

¹¹⁰ George Joseph, 'Ezhava Samudayavum, Hindu Kshetrangalaum' (Ezhava Community and Hindu Temples), *Desabhimani* 17 July 1920.

¹¹¹ Changanasseri Parameswara Pillai, 'Kshetra Pravesanam' (Temple Entry), *Desabhimani*, 16 October 1920.

demand. He observed, 'Madhavan issues edicts against those who oppose him'. And he doubts whether 'such an edict will be issued to Narayana Guru also'.¹¹²

The debate and writings appeared in various papers amply proved the impact of the temple entry demand in the social history of Travancore. This has also revealed that the discourse paradigm of social history of Kerala run parallel and opposite to the dominant discourse of Indian history. While the struggle against British shaped the destiny of nation, the struggle of the Ezhava community for temple entry reshaped the social equilibrium here. With this the process of community formation of Ezhavas has certainly entered a new phase. The struggle altered the priorities of the communities, forcing every section to take a position on this issue. The hierarchical values of caste underwent a rigorous interrogation.

While championing the cause of temple entry demand of Ezhavas, Desabhimani undoubtedly upheld the true spirit of debate in a most democratic fashion. During this period it regularly carried discussions and debates which included the views of those who opposed it. This helped in increasing the circulation of the paper.

Towards the close of 1920 T.K. Madhavan further hardened his position towards the demand. He asked the Ezhavas not to co-operate in any way with the government initiatives in repairing the dilapidated and old temples. The temples were repaired using government and locally mobilized funds. Desabhimani urged Ezhavas not to give any money to this venture as they were denied entry into these temples. 'If some insist money, ensure the entry first'. T.K. Madhavan wrote that if anybody co-operated with government venture, it

¹¹² Moorkothu Kumaran, 'Kshetra Pravesana Vadam' (Temple Entry Demand) *Desabhimani*, 30 October 1920.

would be equal to suicide and he declared 'no contribution without temple entry'.¹¹³

During the same period a debate gained currency that the very claim of Ezhavas could not be justified. The first objection was that the temples were not maintained by public funds and the government had only the status of a trustee regarding temples. Secondly Ezhava's entry into temple would lead to serious consequences and so they must refrain from the demand. Desabhimani countered these objections and observed that this was only the prejudice of Nairs.¹¹⁴

Apart from Desabhimani, other papers, who espoused the cause of Ezhavas, countered the objections of upper castes especially Nairs. They held the view that Savarna objection that the temples were not maintained by public fund was a blatant lie and a cheat. Elaborately quoting from the budget estimate for the year 1096 M.E (1920-21) *Samatwavadi* refuted the claims of upper castes with facts and figures. It observed that if the government withdrew fund to those schools which were denied admission to non caste Hindus, similar measure should be applied to temples. *Samtwavadi* also mocked at the upper castes' contention that the Ezhavas must wait for some more time for temple entry. It also said if government decided to allow Ezhavas into school despite the opposition of upper castes, similar pattern should be adopted in the temple entry also.¹¹⁵ The claim of the upper castes doesn't have an iota of truth as the government itself admitted the fact that the expenditure to Dewaswom and charitable institutions are met with funds from other sources.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Desabimani, 'Kshetra Pravesanam' 11 September 1920.

¹¹⁴ Desabimani, 'Kshetra Prevesanam' 20 October 1920.

¹¹⁵ Samathwavadi, 'Kshetra Pravesanam' 14 August 1920.

¹¹⁶ Travancore Administration Report, 1920 - 21, 'Religion and Charitable Institutions', p. 103 see also 'Rao Bahadur Raghvayyayum Bharana Parishkara Sramangalum' (Rao Bahudar Rahavayya and Administrative Reform Efforts), Kerala Kaumudi article cited in *Sahodaran*, *Edavaom 1096 M.E* (May 1921), Book No. 3, Issue No. 12, pp. 454 - 459.

These debates and discussions invariably give the impression that the socio-reform initiatives of the SNM proved as a trend setter in the intellectual sphere. Intellectual enquiries percolated down to the micro aspects of caste and community. Intellectual discourse revealed new dimensions and insights and this can be considered as one of the original contributions of the SNM.

Towards Temple Boycott; Historic Trajectory

During the last months of 1920 in many places spontaneous but spectacular assertions of Ezhavas led to numerous riots. In most of these places Ezhavas began to boycott the caste Hindu temples which further aggravated the situation. The worst kinds of conflicts were witnessed in Travancore during the year 1920. Without properly understanding the exact dimensions involved in these social tensions, some writers generalized the conflict between Ezhavas and Nairs and viewed it was due to 'these two castes form the immediate boundaries of savarna/ avarna divide'.¹¹⁷

In Thiruvalla, Chengannoor and other places riots between Nairs and Ezhavas took place over passage of Ezhavas in the roads round temples. Nairs lodged complaint against Ezhavas for rioting and arson attack of temples. Thirteen Ezhavas were sentenced by lower court in connection with an attack on a temple at Kottah near Chengannoor. Ezhavas filed appeal in the High Court and all the thirteen were acquitted. In Evoor temple, Tripunithura Ezhavas publicly entered the temple. As tension ran high in Thiruvalla over the passage of Ezhavas in the prohibited road round the temple, almost all important leaders of SNDP Yogam including N. Kumaran Asan, N. Kumaran and M. Govindan visited the place.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella, 'Ezhavas and the Micro Politics of Castes, or the Political in the Personal', *Journal of South Indian History*, Vol.1, Issue No.2, March- August 2004, Calicut, University of Calicut p. 46.

¹¹⁸ *Desabhimani*, Various Issues since June 1920.

T.K. Madhavan after giving prior notice to local Magistrate walked through the roads round the Vaikom temple, braving *Theendal* boards on the *Vaikkathastami* day in 1920.¹¹⁹ This earned wide publicity and triggered debates in various papers. A caste Hindu newspaper carried an editorial deploring the action of T.K. Madhavan.¹²⁰ He replied that the self respect of Ezhavas did not allow them to wait till doomsday for favorable orders from the government.¹²¹ The government already assured N. Kumaran Asan that the *Theendal* boards established at the entry points of almost all temples would be removed, but nothing happened.¹²²

T.K. Madhavan also gave a call to Ezhavas to enter public temples peacefully and without taking law into their hands. He wanted to undertake sacrifice by peaceful means. Imitating Gandhiji, he gave a call for Passive Resistance (*Samadhana Roopeneyullah Sahana Samaram*).¹²³

SNDP Endorses Temple Boycott

In this background a special meeting of SNDP Yogam was held at Sivagiri, presided over by N. Kumaran, the General Secretary of SNDP Yogam. This meeting adopted a document titled '*Ten Points to be observed by Ezhavas with regard to Temple Entry*' and the message was called *Kshetra Sandesam*. This meeting, according to the biographer of T.K. Madhavan, was held on 17 *Dhanu 1096 ME* (December 1920).¹²⁴ This document was signed by T.K. Madhavan, N. Kumaran, C.V. Kunjuraman and Kayyalakkal Padhmanabhan. A temple entry agitation committee was formed in this meeting in which T.K. Madhavan was one of its members. The document in short urged total boycott

¹¹⁹ *Sahodaran*, 'Oru Dheera Krityam' (A Brave Act), *Dhanu 1093 M.E* (December 1920-January 1921) Book No. 3, Issue No. 8, p. 285.

¹²⁰ *Veera Keralan*, 14 January 1921 (*1 Makaram 1096 M.E*).

¹²¹ *Desabhimani*, 15 January 1921.

¹²² *Proceedings of Travancore Legislature Council*, 11 November 1920.

¹²³ *Desabhimani*, 11 November 1920.

¹²⁴ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.119-20.

of temples in which Ezhavas were denied entry. It also urged Ezhavas to allow entry to every one in Ezhava public temples. The meeting decided to publish, circulate and propagate the message in maximum possible ways.¹²⁵

Huge public meetings were held all over Travancore and the message spread to grass root level. On account of temple boycott caste Hindu temples found it very hard to look after the routine affairs. These temples suffered considerable cut in their income.

In fact the Padanayarkulangara incident and the consequent development forced the leadership to adopt a radical position like temple boycott. The threat of conversion posed such a big challenge before the leadership. 'We could take these as representing a historic shift from acceptance to outright rejection of the caste system and its values'.¹²⁶ Moreover this period also witnessed tremendous upheavals among the non-caste Hindus in many parts of Indian subcontinent. This period also showed the meteoric rise of B.R. Ambedkar.¹²⁷ The early decades of 20th century in India saw the proliferation of caste conferences, associations and movements.¹²⁸

T.K. Madhavan and his earlier perception of Nationalism

Ezhavas were in an upbeat mood since the beginning of 1920 and reached its crescendo towards the end of the year. The complexities of the situation due to riots, conversion and temple boycott were phenomenal. When these developments took place in Travancore, Gandhiji was leading his first major offensive against the British. The NCM inflicted little influence in Travancore. Before going into the details of reflections of NCM in Travancore let us see the position of T.K Madhavan.

¹²⁵ *Sahodaran*, November- December 1920 (*Vrischigom 1096 M.E*), Book No. 3, Issue No. 7, p.277.

¹²⁶ Ursula Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 50 – 51.

¹²⁷ Gail Omvedt, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

¹²⁸ Sumit Sarkar, 1995. *Modern India 1885 – 1947*, Madras, Macmillan, p.158.

Madhavan's earlier attitude towards nationalist struggle was certainly in tune with the position of SNM. He perceived that the anti British struggle of Gandhiji was in no way helpful for the Ezhavas or the oppressed sections and it also would not bring Ezhavas and others in the mainstream Hindu fold. He critiqued nationalism in this period on the ground that it would not forge the unity of Hindus, spread over various castes. But Madhavan failed to understand the inalienable relation between Nation and Hinduism. The passionate appeal of anti-British struggle was communicated through religion citing heroes and myths from sacred texts of Hindu religion 'Tilak used Bhagavat Gita, as the need for courage in the battle was used to inspire resistance to the British. He recalls Krishna's advice to Arjuna'.¹²⁹ The idea of Golden Age was to become one of the corner stones of Hindu nationalism observes Christophe Jafferlot.¹³⁰ One of the stalwarts of the nationalist movement and a prominent personality from South India G. Subramoniya Iyer unequivocally declared 'the basic aim of Indian National Congress is to create unity and sense of brotherhood among the Hindus'.¹³¹

Despite the failure to found the linkage between nation and religion, T.K. Madhavan opposed the nationalist agenda and its political programme till late 1921. He profusely attacked Home Rule Movement just before the temple entry demand was openly announced in Desabhimani. He observed that at this stage the Home Rule would endanger the interest of Ezhavas. He had no hesitation in declaring that 'Home rule is death to lower castes'.¹³²

¹²⁹ M. Adden Walla, 'Hindu Concepts and the Gita in Early Indian thought' in R.A. Sakai (ed.), 1961. *Studies on Asia*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, pp. 16 – 23.

¹³⁰ Christophe Jafferlot, 1999. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to the 1990's*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, pp. 11.

¹³¹ G. Subramaniya Iyer, 1888. *Aryajana Iykiyam Allathu Congress Mahasabha* (Unity of Aryan People or the Indian National Congress), Madras, National Press, p. 40.

¹³² *Desabhimani*, 'Ezhavarude Sankatam' (Grievances of Ezhavas) 10 November 1917.

The attitude of Madhavan towards Home Rule movement at this time reminds us the self respecer's criticism towards it. The non-Brahman movement opposed Home Rule movement tooth and nail since the release of the non-Brahman manifesto in December 1916.¹³³

The transition from 'Home Rule is death to lower castes' to 'On matters of politics I am an Indian Swarajist' is rather amazing and intriguing. Since 1922 he spiritedly and passionately accepted the leadership of Indian National Congress and its programme. This transformation had its own cultural reasons. A staunch follower of *Sanatana* Hindu concept, whose cultural moorings were deeply anchored in Hindu values and as such he could not differentiate and contextualize the intricate relation between Hindu culture and Nationalism. Indian nationalism was the congruent process of capturing political power and restoring the cultural values of upper castes. That is precisely the reason why the cultural nationalism became the central agenda of the contemporary *Hindutva* forces.

T.K. Madhavan was highly critical of the programme of Indian National Congress. After taking stock of INC's 32nd session held in Calcutta during 26-29 December 1917, he wrote, 'until social justice and equal representation of various communities are achieved there is no need for Swaraj immediately'.¹³⁴ On temple entry and freedom of passage through the public paths, he asked Ezhavas not to show any patience and eulogised the British rule.¹³⁵ Narayana Guru himself admitted that Ezhavas benefited much from the benevolence of British rule. He was responding to the news that a Tiyya (Ezhava) walked along with a British official through the Vaikom temple roads.¹³⁶

¹³³ Non Brahmin Movement 1910 – 1920 in *History of Freedom Movement File*, Bundle No. 77, pp. 36- 45. TNA, Chennai. Manifesto Quoted in *The Hindu*, 20 December 1916. ('South Indian Peoples Association. A New Organization and the Non Brahmin Manifesto')

¹³⁴ *Desabhimani*, 5 January 1918.

¹³⁵ *Desabhimani*, 20 July 1918.

¹³⁶ *Vivedodayam*, Special Issue, January 1967, Book No. 1, Issue No. 1, p. 156.

While NCM was in its full bloom, in Travancore the agitation for civil rights waged by Ezhavas went on in similar vein. T.K. Madhavan's appropriation of NCM shows the tremendous internal conflict he experienced. He observed, 'now NCM has spread all over India and unfortunately in Travancore it reflected as what happened in Padanayar Kulangara'.¹³⁷ We can dismiss the riot between Nairs and Ezhavas in Padanayarkulangara as it has nothing to do with the national movement. But an unconscious apprehension might have influenced the Ezhavas that through the national movement, the domination of the upper castes could only be further consolidated and it would re-appear in new forms.

T.K. Madhavan was quite skeptical about Gandhian modes of struggle also. He was averse to the boycott of foreign goods particularly clothes. Gandhiji's campaign of setting bon-fire of foreign clothes was inaugurated on 31 July 1921 near Eliphinston Mills, Bombay. This symbolic action received media attention in a wide scale and Gandhiji asked people that there should not be any single piece of foreign cloth after 31 September 1921. T.K. Madhavan was of the view that this action would only eliminate outer impurity and to eliminate inner impurity Congress must launch campaign for anti-untouchability. He also critiqued the stand of Travancore Congress Committee, which was not ready to undertake the temple entry question of oppressed castes. He urged Gandhiji and his followers that to achieve Swaraj, caste monster should be burnt.¹³⁸

The national movement has always given an impression that it represented all sections of Indians and it reiterated a myth that certain sections lacked the ability of self representation. In a considerable way the Ezhavas of

¹³⁷ T.K. Madhavan, 'Sahakarana Tyagam' (Non-Co-operation Movement), *Desabhimani*, 18 September 1920.

The special session of INC met at Calcutta in 4-9 September 1920 adopted the NCM resolution moved by Gandhiji and subsequently regularized in the Nagpur session of INC in December 1920.

¹³⁸ *Desabhimani*, 12 August 1921.

Cochin and Travancore challenged this notion of irrepressibility by opposing the NCM.

In Cochin the caste oppression was severe and Ezhavas were subjected to many hardships. Time and again T.K. Madhavan and Desabhimani took up the issue in a virulent fashion. T.K. Madhavan attended a Tiyya conference held in Calicut on 18 October 1918 to discuss the hardships of Ezhavas in Cochin. This conference resolved not to observe the custom of distance pollution. T.K. Madhavan moved an amendment that sathyagraha should be observed in the event of any difficulty in implementing the decision of the conference and this was unanimously endorsed. A Tiyya Passive Resistance League was formed accordingly. The conference observed that it was the British rule (Calicut was under Madras Presidency) that facilitated to convene such a meeting.¹³⁹

The Ezhavas of Cochin opposed the Non-Co-operators. During the first week of March 1921 a rather serious disturbance occurred in Trichur, where the Christians supported by Tiyyas came into conflict with Non-Co-Operators, who were Mohammedans and Nairs. 'The immediate cause of the present trouble was a series of loyal but somewhat provocative demonstrations held by Christians and Tiyyas to resist the entry of Non-Co-operators in the state'.¹⁴⁰ Here the Ezhavas did not observe passive resistance but violently resisted the Non-Co-operators.

In Travancore also government reports amply show that the Ezhavas were not interested in NCM instead their attention was focused on temple entry agitation. They organised several meetings in various places in this regard. One of the reports says that 'Kumaran Asan, it is reported that is now residing in his

¹³⁹ K.R. Achuthan, *op.cit.*, p. 109. Also see *Desabhimani*, 'Kozhikode Ezhava Mahayogam, Oru Driksakshi Vivaranam' (An Eyewitness Account on the Grand Meeting of the Ezhavas at Calicut), 26 October 1918.

¹⁴⁰ *Fort Nightly Reports, Strictly Confidential*, 1921. TNA, Chennai. (Demi Official Letter, No. 1428-1 / Public, dated 17 March 1921, Fort St. George, From Chief Secretary to Government of Madras to Home Secretary to Government of India).

house in Pettah without taking active part with Non-Co-operators of the place who are mostly Mohammedans and Nairs. He is a leader of Ezhavas and his activities are chiefly towards the Temple Entrance'.¹⁴¹

Similarly during the same period the Ezhavas under the leadership of Sahodaran Ayyappan completely abstained from the movement. They steadfastly demanded to rectify their grievances including temple entry. One such meeting was held at *Alwaye Advaitashramam* under the auspices of *Sahodara Sangham* on 15 May 1921, presided over by none other than Narayana Guru. It was attended by E.K. Ayyakutty, C.V. Kunuraman, Natarajan, son of Dr. Palpu, K. Padmandbhan, manager Desabhimani, M.K. Raman and Vadakara Rugmini. It was earlier announced that no political matter would be discussed in the meeting. Contrary to this C.V. Kunjuraman touched the ongoing struggle led by Gandhiji but he was immediately stopped by K. Ayyappan to proceed on the topic.

Narayana Guru presided over the meeting for sometime and in his absence E.K. Ayyakutty took over. The District Superintendent of Police, Kottayam wrote to Commissioner of Police, Travancore

'This meeting was presided by the religious head of Ezhavas, Sri Narayana Guru himself. He made a new pronouncement of great significance. He said as all humanity is from one caste, there is no objection to inter-dining and inter-marriage ... A pamphlet with a portrait of the Guru expounding the doctrine, is opposed to all fundamental principles of Hindu social system and the significance of the pronouncement lies in the fact that it shows that the Ezhavas are going to have a big organized fight for the destruction of Hindu social system'.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ *Kerala Archives News Letter*, Trivandrum, Directorate of Archives, Vol. II, Issue No. II & III March- June 1976, pp. 43 – 44. [Letter from the District Superintendent of Police dated 2.04.1921 to W.H. Pitt, Commissioner of Police, Travancore, on 'Khilafath and Ezhava Uplift Movement in Travancore.']

¹⁴² *Archives Treasury*, 1994. Trivandrum, Kerala State Archives, p.248 and 251 [Police Report on this meeting of *Sahodara Sangam*, was sent by the Police Inspector's Office, Alwaye to the Commissioner of Police, Travancore vide letter, dated 16 May 1921 and the Police Report on the 'Message of Narayana Guru', was sent by the District Superintendent of Police, Kottayam to the Commissioner of Police, Travancore, vide letter dated 24 May 1921.]

The report further warned the government about the pronouncement of Guru which would have huge impact in Vaikom and Shertala taluks, where Ezhavas enjoyed numerical majority. It requested to deploy additional police force in these taluks to keep the law and order situation well under control.

It is very important to note the timing of the pronouncement, i.e. to neglect the Hindu social system, and that was when the NCM was on its march. Narayana Guru's pronouncement was a considerable deviation from the stand he has taken so far. The police report also mentioned about the temple entry demand raised in the meeting on which it assumed that it was an effort to assimilate with Hindu fold and to elevate the Ezhavas position. So this can be considered a part of Sanskritization process. M.N. Srinivas says 'a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its customs ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of high and frequently 'Twice Born' caste'.¹⁴³ But when we analyze the Non-Brahman movement in Tamil Nadu and Satya Shodak Samaj in Maharashtra they cannot be explained under the theoretical construct of Sanskritization, Sumit Sarkar explains after citing the study of Gail Omvedt.¹⁴⁴

Ayyappan's approach towards the political activities of nationalists shows the pulse of Ezhavas especially the young section of the community. Unproblematic towards nationalist movement and its social content some writers blame Ayyappan and other leaders for not understanding the significance of anti imperialist struggle.¹⁴⁵ This observation was made in tune with Marxist historiography on modern Indian history. In fact, Sri Narayana movement had rigorously evaluated the socio-political content of the anti-imperialist struggle right from its inception, on which K. Ayyappan and C. Krishnan contributed much.

¹⁴³ M.N. Srinivas, 1966, Rpt. (2003). *Social Change in Modern India*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, pp. 6 – 7.

¹⁴⁴ Sumit Sarkar, *op.ci.t.*, p. 158.

¹⁴⁵ P.K. Gopalakrishnan, 1974. *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitram* (Cultural History of Kerala) Trivandrum, State Institute of Languages, p. 542.

The Marxists seldom encouraged subaltern assertions on caste lines, similar to that of nationalists. E.M.S. Namboodiripad writes, 'Caste associations at times were the first form in which the peasant masses rose in struggle against feudalism'. But he quickly adds that the grip of these caste organisations on the peasantry has to be broken if they are to be organised as a class.¹⁴⁶ Gandhiji held similar views as early as in 1920's. 'I am one of those who do not consider caste to be a harmful institution. In its origin caste was a whole custom and promoted national well being'.¹⁴⁷

The Ezhava sentiment towards the NCM was vividly echoed in *Desabhimani* as T.K. Madhavan took a hostile attitude towards the movement by contextualizing the situation in Travancore during the period. In a letter to the editor, *Desabhimani*, one A.K. Gopalan rightly expressed the sentiment of Ezhavas. He says, 'here non-co-operation is being practiced among communities, so there is no use of practicing non-co-operation towards the British and there is no meaning in achieving Swaraj in this situation'.¹⁴⁸

Temple Boycott: Manifestation and Impacts

Temple entry agitation achieved huge momentum since the boycott call given by SNDP Yogam. Local Ezhava samajams conducted numerous meetings and resolved to boycott caste Hindu temples, where they were denied entry. It is highly interesting to note the fact that when NCM reached its crescendo elsewhere in the country, in Travancore Ezhavas organized big events for achieving temple entry. The meetings organized by Ezhavas were unprecedented in the history of Travancore in terms of the number of people

¹⁴⁶ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, 1952. *National Question in Kerala*, Bombay, People's Publishing House, p.102, also see Dilip Menon, 'Being the Brahmin the Marxist Way', E.M.S. Namboodiripad and the Past of Kerala' in Daud Ali (ed.), 1999. *Invoking the Past: The uses of History in South Asia*, New Delhi, OUP, p. 84.

¹⁴⁷ M.K. Gandhi, 'Young India 25 February. 1920' in Anand T. Hingorani (ed.), 1965. *My Varnashrama Dharma by M.K. Gandhi*, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, pp. 1 – 2.

¹⁴⁸ A.K. Gopalan, 'Vidyarthikalodu Randu Vaakku' (Few Words to Students), *Desabhimani*, 20 February 1921.

participated and their historic decisions. The meetings were not confined within the temple entry demand.

In one such meeting at Chenganda near Shertala, organized by Shertala Ezhava Yuvajana Seva Sangham, held on 15-16 January 1921 was attended by more than ten thousand people. Since electric audio system was not available at that time, speeches were amplified by four persons in four directions from the dais to make it audible to the gathering. Almost all senior leaders of SNDP Yogam including Narayana Guru attended the meeting, though he did not speak.

The clarion call for temple boycott was made in this meeting. This meeting was also attended by Nair Service Society Secretary, Manathu Padmanabha Pillai. He came to this meeting with a particular intention, to forge an organization for Hindu unity. Pillai himself disclosed this intention but deferred it knowing the upbeat mood of the conference. Another upper caste leader M.N. Nair urged Ezhavas to observe satyagraha rather than temple boycott and it was opposed by C.V. Kunjuraman and hence the idea also was dropped.¹⁴⁹ Similar to that of Chenganda meeting another mammoth gathering of temple boycott movement was held at Kattoor, near Karappuram, also in Shertala Taluk under the auspices of Karappuram Ezhava Samajam. T.K. Madhavan himself attended this meeting.¹⁵⁰

When the temple boycott movement was going on, some caste Hindu temples including one or two major temples caught fire. Some of the caste Hindu news papers suspected Ezhavas behind these incidents. While dismissing these allegations T.K. Madhavan appealed the government not to repair the damaged temples from the public fund. He extended solidarity with a Christian delegation and urged the government not to repair the Harippad Subramanya

¹⁴⁹ *Desabhimani*, 22 January 1921.

¹⁵⁰ *Desabhimani*, 26 February 1921.

temple, which was damaged by fire. Madhavan advised similar initiatives must also come from the Ezhava side.¹⁵¹

Ezhavas organized several campaigns urging the people not to co-operate with caste-Hindu temples in any manner. As this campaign proved very effective the caste Hindu temples suffered heavy loss in income. During the same period, Ezhava volunteers of Pathanamthitta dissuaded their community men from undertaking pilgrimage to Sabarimala Sri Sastha temple. The volunteers of temple boycott movement were led by Muloor S. Padmanabha Panicker. Ezhavas felt no remorse in dissuading the pilgrims to Sabarimala temple which is one of the richest temples in India today. T.K Madhavan endorsed it and said such moves from the community would lead them to the Promised Land.¹⁵²

Heeding to the call of Ezhavas other non-caste Hindu communities also boycotted the festivals. Haripad Subramonya temple and Evoor Srikrishnaswami temple are in Karthikapalli taluk, strong hold of the Ezhavas in Travancore. *Kammalas* (carpenters) were asked not to associate with these temples. In most of the temples flag posts were built and donated to temples by this community.¹⁵³

T. K. Madhavan toured all over Travancore and attended many meetings espousing the cause of temple boycott. One such huge meeting was held at Kannamangalam on 31 January 1921. The main agenda of the meeting was to initiate steps to boycott the festival of Chettikulangara temple where Ezhavas usually donate huge amount for the conduct of the festival.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Editorial, 'Nammalum Udan Harji Kodukkanum' (We should also Give Petition), *Desabhimani*, 22 January 1921.

¹⁵² *Desabhimani*, 5 March 1921.

¹⁵³ Velu Achary, 'Harippad Kshetram Pani' (Haripad Temple Work), *Desabhimani*, 5 March 1921.

¹⁵⁴ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

T. K. Madhavan was again nominated to SMPA, to be held its 17th session in March 1921. Meanwhile Raghavaiah became the Dewan of Travancore. As was the practice, T.K. Madhavan sent his subject to be presented in the SMPA session well in advance to the government. His subject was *Equality of civic rights with special reference to admission of all Hindus into public temples*. Before the commencement of the session Chief Secretary to Government, Raja Rama Rao, replied that the subject could not be presented before the session as it was a subject prohibited under rule XIX (d) of SMPA. He wrote, 'as being directly connected with religion, the government altered the subject into *Equality of Civil Rights* and trust that no reference to the question of admission into temple will be made in the course of discussion'.¹⁵⁵

T. K. Madhavan met Dewan in person, requested him to allow the matter to be presented, but was summarily turned down. It is quiet intriguing that the same subject was presented by the same member in the previous two sessions, i.e., in 1919 and 1920. T.K. Madhavan wrote a strong and indignant editorial in his paper condemning the action of the government. He warned the government and categorically declared that Ezhavas would not succumb to this pressure.¹⁵⁶

SNDP Yogam convened an extra ordinary meeting of Ezhava public in Quilon and deplored the decision of the government vehemently. Widespread protest followed across Travancore and urged the government to withdraw its decision.¹⁵⁷ A huge public meeting was held in Trivandrum at LMS Hall, Palayam on 7 March 1921, to register protest over the decision of the government. The meeting was attended by prominent leaders of Ezhavas and other communities. It unanimously condemned the decision of the government

¹⁵⁵ Letter dated 10 February 1921 from Raja Rama Rao, Chief Secretary to Government of Travancore to T.K. Madhavan, Editor, Desabhimani, Quilon and Member of SMPA cited in P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

¹⁵⁶ Editorial, 'Amarthi Pidichal Kuthichu Chadum' (If suppressed it will out-burst) *Desabhimani*, 26 February 1921.

¹⁵⁷ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

and this meeting was a grand success.¹⁵⁸ The 17th session of SMPA started on 3 March 1921.

Another Ezhava delegation met Dewan and conveyed an ultimatum that if the matter was not allowed to present before the assembly, the entire Ezhava members would boycott the session. At this point Dewan promised that the demand of the delegation would be considered in the next session. The delegation met Dewan after the decision taken in a meeting convened at Kunnukuzhi in Trivandrum. In this meeting there were differences of opinion between Kumaran Asan and others and finally it was sorted out.¹⁵⁹

T.K. Madhavan spoke on 11 March 1921 in SMPA. 'He expressed the regret of his community at the decision of the government and proceeded to state that the issue of entry into temples was not a religious subject and that he would assign certain reasons in support of his view. The Dewan said that the ruling of the government was final and that he would not allow the matter to be discussed or reasons assigned in support of any opinion to the contrary. Mr. Madhavan said he would obey the rule and withdraw'.¹⁶⁰ Madhavan also said his brother members had already made representation about the grievances of the Ezhava community and requested that their representation might be given fair consideration. He then submitted two memorials signed by Ezhava members of the assembly, one about the Ezhava bill and the other on admission of Ezhavas into temples.¹⁶¹

The debate on temple entry and government's stand towards it justifies the criticism against SMPA, that it is a joke session (*Tamasha*) for some days.¹⁶² In the same session (17th) of SMPA, N.R. Krishnan presented the question of temple entry in a strategic manner as he included it under subject on

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 123–125.

¹⁵⁹ N.R. Krishnan, *op.cit.*, No. 69, pp. 89–90.

¹⁶⁰ *Proceeding of the 17th Session of SMPA*, 10th day (11 March 1921), p. 148 & 170.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Desabhimani*, 14 February 1920.

'Pollution'.¹⁶³ T.K. Madhavan continued his efforts to present the matter before assembly. He once again met Dewan to persuade him but it proved to be a fiasco. The arguments ended in a highly unpleasant tone and Madhavan was forced to say that Ezhavas would abandon Travancore.¹⁶⁴

SNDP held its 18th annual session at Karunagapally on May 1921 and resolved to continue the temple entry agitation vigorously. In recognition to his service T.K. Madhavan was elected as assistant secretary of SNDP Yogam.¹⁶⁵

By the end of 1920 civic right movement was in its last leg as the government accepted the basic demand in principle. So the Ezhavas had to continue the agitation for temple entry single-handedly and they vehemently pursued the same and T.K. Madhavan left no stone unturned. Despite strong appeal from him, sporadic violence occurred between Nairs and Ezhavas in many places. In the wake of temple boycott, the movement of Ezhavas in public paths were further restricted especially in the roads round the temples. The enhanced restriction and constant vigil by upper caste were due to the non-co-operation of Ezhavas with the caste Hindu temples.

When Ezhavas ventured into public road round the temple at Eruvayil north of Kayamkulam, they were terribly beaten by upper caste men and blocked other roads also, resulting in virtual immobility of Ezhavas. Nairs objected Mohammadans passage also on the ground that an Ezhava was employed by a Mohammedan, leading to clashes between Mohammadans and Nairs. Desabhimani observed 'Mohammedans will not succumb to the pressure of Nairs and that is the secret of their victory'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ N.R. Krishnan, *op.cit.*, No. 61, pp. 96 -102.

¹⁶⁴ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 133 - 136.

¹⁶⁵ M.K. Narayanan, 'SNDP Yogavum T.K. Madhavanum' (SNDP Yogam and T.K. Madhavan), in G. Priyadarsanan (ed.), *SNDP Yogam Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, Quilon, SNDP Yogam, 1978, pp. 149 - 150.

¹⁶⁶ *Desabhimani*, 9 April 1921.

A terrible riot broke out between Nairs and Ezhavas at Talayolaparambu near Vaikom on 21 February 1921. Talayolaparambu temple belonged to Nairs of Chozhiyil Elayathu family. In connection with the temple festival, *Arattu* (procession in the final day of temple festival) was conducted. Some Ezhavas entered the public path on which the procession was to pass. Nairs and police attacked the Ezhavas and consequently heavy violence erupted.¹⁶⁷

All these incidents revealed another fact that the solidarity extended by Nair leaders with Ezhava cause of temple entry had not percolated down to the grass root level. Brushing aside the pretensions, Kaanippayoor Sankaran Namboodiripad made it clear that the Nairs were against the cause of Avarnas' temple entry. 'If temple entry is granted to Avarnas the difference between Nairs and Ezhavas will come to an end. Anticipating this eventually many Nairs opposed the temple entry of Avarnas'.¹⁶⁸

The quantum of restriction imposed on Ezhavas varied from temple to temple. Least freedom was enjoyed by Ezhavas in the roads running round the prominent caste Hindu temples. In Sree Krishna Swami temple, Ambalapuzha, Ezhavas were not even allowed to approach the road. But in Ashramam (Quilon) Krishna Swamy temple the restriction was not as harsh as in Ambalapuzha. Temples were classified into major and minor according to the income received. The boycott of Ezhavas reduced the status of many caste Hindu temples.

As the conflict between Ezhavas and Nairs became a regular affair, another massive wave of conversion erupted. Discussions and debates within the Ezhavas community and outside once again centered on the question of conversion of Ezhavas. Sensing the pulse of the community Ayyappan

¹⁶⁷ K.R. Narayan, *op.cit.*, No. 14, pp. 187 – 189 also see *Desabhimani* 2 April 1921. K.R. Narayanan writes the incident occurred on 10 Menom 1097 M.E (21 March 1922) *Desabhimani* says it on 10 Kumbham 1096 M.E (21 February 1921).

¹⁶⁸ Kanipayyur Sankaran Namboodiripad, 1962. *Nayanmarude Poorvacharithram* (The Ancient History of Nairs), Vol.2, Kunnamkulam, Panchangom Pustakasala, pp. 308 – 10.

advocated conversion. He said 'once Ezhavas convert into Christianity, they will get every thing. Those who oppose conversion say it is a shame and not a courageous act'. He dismissed it as a bad rationale. 'To achieve self respect' he wanted Ezhavas to embrace Christianity.¹⁶⁹ Well before him, Thiyya intellectuals like Potheri Kunjambu, (1857-1919) author of the famous novel *Saraswathy Vijayam* (1892) advocated conversion to Christianity. His novel highlighted the benevolent aspects of missionaries.¹⁷⁰

Narayana Guru however did not encourage conversion overtly. He held the view that he had no hatred towards any religion but was against caste discrimination and wanted all human beings should live in harmony irrespective of her/his community. This was pronounced by Guru himself in a conversation with Ayyappan. The eyewitness to this conversation was Kottukoyikkal Velayudhan, who wrote the account subsequently in *Desabhimani*.¹⁷¹ Narayana Guru's stand on this issue was consistent right from the beginning. T.K. Madhavan was well aware of this stand and he enjoyed considerable confidence of Guru. This might have unconsciously influenced in distilling his perspective and position on conversion. Around this time C.V. Kunjuraman also held the view that Tiyyas should adopt Buddhism.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ K. Ayyappan, 'Keralathile Hindu Matam' (Hindu Religion in Kerala), *Sahodaran*, March 1921 (*Kumbham* 1096 M.E), Book No. 3, Issue No. 10, pp. 364 – 68.

He also wrote a monograph, *Parivarthanam* (Transformation), which logically argues that those communities suffer by caste oppression, should leave Hinduism.

¹⁷⁰ Toshie Awaya, 'Some Aspects of Tiyyas' caste movement with special reference to Brithish Malabar' in H. Kotani (ed.), 1997. *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed: Japaneese Studies on South Asia*, No. 1, New Delhi, Manohar, p. 157.

¹⁷¹ Kottukoyikkal Velayudhan, 'Swamy Thrippadavum Matam Mattavum' (Narayana Guru and Conversion), *Desabhimani*, 7 July 1923.

The conversation between Narayana Guru and Ayyappan took place on 30 June 1923 (*16 Mithunam* 1098 M.E). Also see, *Vivekodayam*, April 1973, Book No.7, Issue No. 4 pp. 5-6 & 12 and *Vivekodayam*, May 1972, Book No. 6, Issue No.5, pp. 4 – 6.

¹⁷² C.V. Kunjuraman, 'Tiyyarkku Nallathu Buddhamatam Tanneyanu' (For Tiyyas Buddhism is Good Enough) *Mitavadi*, Special Issue 1924, pp. 6 –24. Also see Dialogue between Narayana Guru and C.V. Kunjuraman in Mayyanad K. Damodaran, 1929, Rpt. (2003). *Sree Narayana Swami Jeeva Charitram* (Biography of Sree Narayana Guru), Trivandrum, Kaumudi Public Relations, pp. 124-135.

The anguish and anger of the Ezhava community over the situation resulted out of prolonged riots and tension was well echoed by some radical Ezhavas from Karappuram in Shertala taluk. Here four Ezhava youths made a passionate appeal in April 1921 asking the community to convert into Christianity. This plea earned wide spread attention and it was hotly debated.

The appeal was issued in writing by Thottupurackal Palpu (Kodalichira Veedu, Kalavamcode) C. Krishnan, (Kunnukuzhi Tharayil, Kalavamcode) S. Madhavan (Kaikkamparambil, Velloorvattom) and M.C. Kuttan Thandan (Photographer, Kalavamcode) given for publication. This precise and sharp appeal logically established the need for conversion, proved to be a severe jolt to the protagonists of temple entry demand.

Excerpts from their appeal: "Despite some concessions granted to Ezhavas in school admission and in government employment, they still suffer a lot on account of severe social oppression. Prohibition boards (*Theendal Palakas*) are put up everywhere, virtually blocking their freedom of passage in public paths. If Ezhavas walk along these paths riot will follow. As the entire state machinery is with the upper castes, we cannot expect justice from the Government. Our leaders instruct us not to plunge into unlawful activities. The leaders console us that our suffering is a part of the *Sanatana Dharma* of Hindu religion. We are asking whether this *Sanatana Dharma* is applicable to us only. Upper castes pay scant respect to this and if they don't want why should we oblige".

"We will remain same as today if we continue in this *Sanatana Dharma*. So we appeal our saviors and leaders to find some other choice. We have left with no other choice but to opt for Christianity. We and our Hindu government itself accepted the suzerainty of the British Empire, followers of Christianity. So we the under signed and our friends are contemplating steps to convert into Christianity, though only a few will endorse our effort".¹⁷³

The appeal earned wide publicity particularly because it challenged the leadership who espoused non-violent method of agitation. Taking inspiration from the appeal one K.M. (full name was not given) declared that he also

¹⁷³ *Desabhimani*, 2 April 1921.

decided to convert into Christianity. In an article he wrote, Ezhavas adopted temple boycott as the last resort, but they suffered much including physical injuries in view of this boycott.¹⁷⁴

Temple boycott of Ezhavas further aggravated the situation and resulted in spiraling the riot and conversion. This posed huge challenge to T.K. Madhavan and SNDP Yogam and proved to be highly complex and difficult to cope with. Those upper castes who espoused the ideology and programme of national movement considered the assertions of Ezhavas as castiest and opposed to the interests of the nation.

All Travancore Haindava Samajam met at Chengannoor on 23 January 1921 and made a clarion call for Hindu unity. It also opposed government's proposed move to take over Hindu temples and its total silence over the question of temple entry of Ezhavas. T.K. Madhavan took exception to the decision of the meeting as it was silent on temple entry question.¹⁷⁵

The growing demand of temple entry of Ezhavas and subsequent boycott of temples polarized the upper castes position also. Caste Hindus openly flouted the demand and started campaign to oppose the temple entry claim. In one of the significant attempts the caste Hindus of Shertala, submitted a memorandum to the Travancore King, Sree Moolam Thirunal. Shertala taluk was one of the strongholds of Ezhavas and a number of Ezhava organizations functioned there. Karappuram Ezhava Samajam was one of the most prominent among them and it was as old as SNDP Yogam.¹⁷⁶ The Shertala Taluk in Travancore always showed the potentialities of Ezhavas in crucial times.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ K.M. 'Ezhavarude Raksha Margam' (Liberation Path of Ezhavas), *Desabhimani*, 9 April 1921.

¹⁷⁵ *Desabhimani*, 5 February 1921.

¹⁷⁶ M.S.A. Rao, *op.cit.*, p 46.

¹⁷⁷ T.M. Thomas Issac and P.K. Michael Tharakan, 1986. *Sree Narayana Movement in Travancore 1888 – 1939*, Working Paper, No. 214, Trivandrum, Centre for Development Studies, p. 14.

Caste Hindus submitted the memorial on 20 May 1921 which questioned every aspect of Ezhava demand for temple entry. It also blamed Ezhavas for inciting violence and riots and pleaded the King to take appropriate action against them. It cried, 'peace and tranquility in Shertala taluk virtually disappeared'.¹⁷⁸

T.K. Madhavan made a point-blank attack on the memorial. He logically established that the government temples were maintained by public funds and as such they should be thrown open to all Hindus. He also refuted the allegation of upper castes on Ezhava violence. He said the hue and cry about Ezhava attack was only a smoke screen.¹⁷⁹

Negotiations with Nationalism

The temple boycott movement launched at the initiative of T.K. Madhavan, in anticipation to tide over the situation has not borne the desired effect. On the contrary it further aggravated the situation, riots and conversion increased. The support extended by the progressive sections of the upper castes had only a cosmetic effect and that too did not percolate down to the masses. At grass root level upper castes opposed the move of Ezhavas with added vigour. T.K. Madhavan was indeed put into a tight corner; his control over the community seemed to be in jeopardy.

T.K. Madhavan decided to take up the issue with the leadership of Indian National Congress, the idea which he was nursing for sometime but put back due to various reasons. The decision of Madhavan to take up the issue with national political leadership itself showed his own dilemma on the question of how to continue the movement. If the movement allowed in its present fashion a sizeable section of Ezhava population would leave Hinduism. Thus the strategies and methods of Madhavan proved not suitable to combat the situation.

¹⁷⁸ Confidential File No. 176/1921, K.S.A., Trivandrum.

¹⁷⁹ Editorial, 'Savarna Hindu Memorial' (Caste Hindu Memorial), *Desabhimani*, 4 June 1921.

Since the second half of 1921 Madhavan seriously considered the question of linking the movement of Ezhavas with national political movement. He held the view that the involvement of upper castes in this historical juncture would create a new turn. He was convinced that if that was achieved he would be able to redirect the movement in which he could still dominate and be able to play a decisive role. Anthony D. Smith puts 'activism and assimilation represent two aspects of the myth of modern nation'.¹⁸⁰

The strategy of assimilation of the national movement was well attested in its anti-untouchability programme. But when the rhetoric translated into practice, it raised serious problems. In its second session of Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) at Palghat, it conducted an inter-dining session which invited strong criticisms from many quarters. Mathrubhoomi, the mouth piece of KPCC wrote editorial. "Every congress man is bound to absolve untouchability, but the issue of inter-dining is different. Everybody has the right to decide with whom, one should dine, which is largely depending on his status and hygiene".¹⁸¹ In this regard M.S.S. Pandian gives the vivid picture of Brahmins, who were quite unwilling to absolve their custom even when they were ardent nationalists. The Brahmin delegates from Madras to the INC session of Calcutta had to travel five days in the ship. All five days, either they took food prepared from their home or they made arrangements in the ship to get separate food for them.¹⁸²

T.K. Madhavan wanted the Travancore State Congress (TSC) to take up the issue of temple entry of Ezhavas, but the plea was turned down. He attended a meeting of TSC held at Ananda Valleeeswaram in Quilon on 20 September

¹⁸⁰ Anthony. D.Smith, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁸¹ Editorial, 'Congressum Mishara Bhojanavum' (Congress and Interdining) *Mathrubhoomi*, 15 May 1923. (The First Issue of Mathrubhoomi came on 17 March 1923.)

¹⁸² M.S.S. Pandian, 2007. *Brahmin and Non Brahmin Genealogies of Tamil Political Present*, Delhi, Permanent Black, pp. 89 – 90.

1921.¹⁸³ There also he attempted to raise the issue. The TSC was defiant on the ground that the issue was related with princely states.

T.K. Madhavan already decided to meet Gandhiji as and when he heard the news that Gandhiji would visit Tirunelveli. Along with P.K. Narayanan, the sub editor of *Desabhimani* he left for Tirunelveli on 22 September 1921 and met Gandhiji on 24 September 1921. It was Madhavan's first meeting with Gandhiji. He had a prolonged discussion with Gandhiji. Madhavan's great respect and reverence for Gandhiji has been vividly captured by his biographer. Though he disagreed with Gandhiji on matters related to caste system, Madhavan endorsed all other programmes of Gandhiji. Madhavan changed into *Khaddar* clothes just before meeting Gandhiji.¹⁸⁴

In his meeting with Gandhiji, Madhavan raised the issue of temple entry of Avarnas in Travancore. Madhavan wanted to link the Congress' programme of untouchability with temple entry question. He said temples were the abode of untouchability and the notion of purity/ pollution originated from temples, so urged Gandhiji to initiate steps for temple entry of Avarnas in Travancore. He added that Ezhavas considered the demand for temple entry as an integral part of eradication of untouchability. Gandhiji replied that even though he agreed with the contention of Madhavan, the demand for temple entry should not be pressed now due to tactical reasons and instead attention should be given to achieve right to draw water from public wells and also for getting admission in public schools.¹⁸⁵

It was very clear that Gandhiji had not openly endorsed the idea of temple entry demand of Ezhavas for tactical reasons, which he did not elaborate. He did not have a clear idea of the social condition that existed in Travancore. Unlike in North India water was not at all a problem in Travancore,

¹⁸³ P.K. Madhavan, the biographer of T.K. Madhavan wrongly put the date of the meeting on 14 Kanni 1097 M.E (30 September 1921), see P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.137.

¹⁸⁴ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.141 – 156.

¹⁸⁵ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 156 – 168 (The entire text of conversation is in these pages).

so there was no question of drawing water from public wells here. Here the *Theendal* boards, prohibiting Ezhavas and other non-caste Hindus to walk along the road, posed a grave threat. Law enforcing agencies scrupulously implemented the instructions in the pollution boards in tandem with upper castes.

After much persuasion and narration of the detailed history of temple entry agitation by Madhavan, Gandhiji agreed on the temple entry issue. He asked Madhavan to take up the issue according to the terms stipulated by him. Gandhiji asked individual civil disobedience to be launched and urged that peace and non-violence should be observed under any condition. People should enter temples individually and not in groups and if the court convicted the individual for breach of law, the individual should be prepared to undergo the jail term. At the request of Madhavan, Gandhiji gave a message in this regard. The text of the message is available in Madhavan's biography, but not in the form as given by Gandhiji, but in the form of what Gandhiji said.¹⁸⁶ (See Appendix III A & B) Regarding temple entry and civil disabilities pertaining to untouchables in Travancore, Gandhiji had issued two messages and handed them over to Madhavan when he visited Gandhiji during January 1926 at Sabarmati as a part of his North Indian tour (Given in Appendix IV & V).

There was a change noticed in Madhavan's attitude towards temple entry question since he returned to Travancore after meeting Gandhiji in September 1921. Before his departure to Tirunelveli he met Narayana Guru and obtained his permission as he used to do before every important action. Madhavan asked C.V. Kunjuraman to accompany him to Tirunelveli and when Kunjuraman declined he took P.K. Narayanan, sub editor of *Desabhimani* along with.¹⁸⁷ On his return to Travancore he got wide publicity and applause.

¹⁸⁶ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 169.

¹⁸⁷ Dr. Babu Vijayanth, Interview with the Author, at his residence on 25 September 2004.

Dr. Babu Vijayanath observed that his father assumed the stature of Nelson, the British Admiral who defeated the Napoleonic forces at the battle of Trafalgar.¹⁸⁸

But Madhavan was unable to continue the temple entry agitation as it was done earlier, for which his biographer attributes various reasons including the student unrest in Travancore during that time. Move over Narayana Guru had also asked him to concentrate on prohibition campaign and other community activities.¹⁸⁹

As explained elsewhere, Madhavan already visualized the end result of temple entry agitation, had it been waged in the same tempo. The conversion surge among the community members posed a grave threat to his dreams. Conversion was resulted out of the severe tension between Ezhavas and Nairs. To ease the situation an alliance with upper castes was required. The temperance movement, which Madhavan conceived could achieve the desired effect.

Anti-Liquor Campaign (1921-23)

Temple Entry agitation was sidetracked from October 1921 to the close of 1923, though it was not abandoned. This period showed the beginning of the change in direction of the demand of temple entry. It was transformed into the demand for freedom of movement. Since his return from Tirunelveli, Madhavan became more enthusiastic about nationalists' agenda and its programme. Desabhimani was particularly careful in not criticising Indian National Congress or its programmes during this period.

Campaign against liquor was a part of Gandhiji's constructive programme of reform which Narayana Guru Swamy had initiated much

¹⁸⁸ Dr. Babu Vijayanth, Interview with the Author, at his residence on 30 September 2004.

¹⁸⁹ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

earlier.¹⁹⁰ By leading an agitation for prohibition; Madhavan mediated the community through the nationalist programme. On temple entry, Gandhiji instructed Madhavan to observe individual satyagraha and not mass entry into temples with strict compliance of non-violence and rule of law. This itself proved to be a built-in-depressor to the agitation of temple entry and it was welcomed by upper castes for obvious reasons.

The next two years Madhavan concentrated his activities on anti-liquor campaign, which earned him the title; *Pussyfoot* of Travancore.¹⁹¹ The timing of the temperance agitation in Travancore led by Madhavan also deserves attention. As the government was unrelenting despite strong agitation for temple entry during this period, the Ezhavas thought about choosing other religions. Around this time some Ezhava leaders including C. Krishnan left Hinduism. A new device was required in the place of temple entry agitation to continue the spirit of community and to stall the conversion. Anti-liquor agitation proved worthy in these lines. 'Madhavan earned full hearted support from the upper castes'. When the temperance movement assumed militancy in Shertala, (the place witnessed many Ezhava assertions) under the auspices *Madhu Varjana Prastanam*, (movement for boycott of liquor) the Savarna Congress nationalists encouraged it and perceived in it an opportunity for anti-government agitation.¹⁹²

Traditionally Ezhavas engaged in toddy tapping and tending coconut palms. Robin Jeffrey vividly gives the account of this and its implications.¹⁹³ The anti-liquor drive was officially sanctioned by SNDP Yogam and Narayana

¹⁹⁰ M.S.A. Rao, *opcit.*, p. 67

¹⁹¹ Pussy-foot - A teetotaler or prohibitionist (A person who favours or advocates prohibition). A member of the Prohibition Party organized in United States of America in 1869. The period from 1920 - 1933, the sale of alcoholic beverages in USA was forbidden by an amendment to constitution. W.E. Johnson (Pussyfoot) was one of the leading campaigners of prohibition in USA.

¹⁹² K.K. Kusuman, 1976. *Kerala Charitra Padanangal* (Studies in Kerala History), Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, pp. 78 - 106.

¹⁹³ Robin Jeffrey, 1976, Rpt. (1994). *Decline of Nair Dominance*, New Delhi, Manohar, p. 128.

Guru earlier as an effort to erase the stigma attached to them as a toddy tapping community and raise their status.¹⁹⁴ Madhavan's intervention in this regard sidelined the temple entry demand which he himself led. Madhavan's earlier efforts in anti-liquor direction had not percolated down to the Ezhava masses or precisely to the sections directly related with liquor trade.

Even before issuing the famous message on liquor, 'produce not, sell not and drink not' in September 1920 (*Chingam 1096 M.E*) Narayana Guru always encouraged prohibition. He considered liquor caused economic distress and social degradation.¹⁹⁵ T.K.Madhavan himself moved a resolution asking Ezhavas to abandon toddy tapping and liquor trade, in the 18th session of SNDP Yogam held at Karunagapally in May 1921, and it was unanimously endorsed.¹⁹⁶ But it was not perceived as a programme of SNDP Yogam.

T.K. Madhavan was the first leader who publicly carried out a long struggle for prohibition in Travancore. Desabhimani regularly published editorials highlighting the issues related to liquor and the need for abandoning the manufacture, sale and consumption of it. It also carried reports of agitation in this direction held in various places.

Alumootil Channars, the paternal family of T.K. Madhavan was one of the prominent Abkari contractor (*kalal kuthaka*) groups in Travancore. Babu Vijayanath told this author that Alumootil Channars monopolised the *Kalal Kutaka* of Vaikom range and from there they earned huge income. The family even purchased a large tract of paddy field from this income and it was called *Vaikattu Vayal* (Vaikom Paddy Field) named after Vaikom Siva temple where Madhavan launched the famous satayagraha.¹⁹⁷ The nuances incurred in these regard will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁹⁴ T.M. Thomas Issac and Michael Tharakan, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁵ Chandra Mohan, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁹⁶ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁹⁷ Dr. Babu Vijayanath, Interview with the Author, at his residence, on 20 February 2005.

The Abkari policy of the government was not in favour consumption or promoting the liquor industry, but never implemented it since it was so dear to the exchequer. In fact the consumption of both arrack and toddy increased, disproportionate to the increase in population. During 1911-1920 the sale of arrack and toddy registered an increase of 47 % and 50% respectively, but the population increase was only 17%.¹⁹⁸

Anti-liquor activists concentrated their efforts to get the regulations of the government implemented on liquor manufacture and sale for which the prohibitionist adopted lawfully sanctioned methods of agitation. The entire agitation wore a Gandhian tint. Everywhere the activists propagated Guru's message and dissuaded the public from activities related to liquor industry.

T. K. Madhavan toured all over Travancore and attended various prohibition meetings and made eloquent and passionate speeches. One such huge meeting in which he spoke was held at Meentalakara, in Thiruvalla taluk on 8 and 9 July, 1922. Here Madhavan spoke on the steps to be adopted by the community to eradicate liquor.¹⁹⁹ Similar meetings were held in Ramangari in Alleppey (20 July 1922) and in Karthikapally (29 September 1922). Desabhimani regularly published reports of social boycott observed by community towards those who engaged in liquor industry.²⁰⁰

The Karthikapally meeting also decided to entrust M.R. Madhava Variyar to move a resolution against manufacture of liquor in Travancore Legislative Council. Accordingly he moved the resolution on 23 November 1922 in which he asked not to manufacture liquor except for medicinal and industrial purposes. In this regard Madhavan pleaded for prohibition as implemented in United States of America.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 432.

¹⁹⁹ *Desabhimani*, 20 July 1922.

²⁰⁰ *Desabhimani*, 'Madhya Vyavasayikalkku Kshetratilum Kulathilum Pravesanamillah' (No Admission in Temples and Ponds to Liquor Manufacturers), 27 July 1922.

²⁰¹ Editorial, Niyama Nirmana Sabhayum, Madhuvarjanavum (Travancore Legislative Council and Liquor Prohibition), *Desabhimani*, 25 November 1922.

The initiative of Madhava Variyar coupled with the agitation led by Madhavan forced the government to agree to implement total prohibition in a phased manner. The agitation gathered momentum and it effected a telling impact on the income of the government. The revenue income from Abkari registered a considerable decrease. Government unleashed terror, resorted to violent methods to cope with the situation. Madhavan undertook hectic campaign and everywhere he stressed the ideals of Guru and Gandhiji. Madhavan wrote a series of editorials in his paper during the period, as if there was no other problem in Travancore. In all these writings there was a conscious effort to nationalise the community. He whipped the passions of the community members profusely reiterating the stand of Narayana Guru and Gandhiji and stressed the need for observing non-violence in agitations. He also urged Ezhavas to shed the parochial community feelings and mingle with the upper castes in their endeavour.²⁰²

Interestingly Dr. Palpu, the doyen of SNDP Yogam had a quite different and even contradictory vision to that of Madhavan in this regard. Dr. Palpu considered manufacture and sale of toddy as an industrial enterprise. He always wanted industries to flourish and urged Ezhavas to begin industrial ventures for the all round progress of the community. The industrial exhibition conducted in connection with the second session of SNDP Yogam in 1905 was in fact the handiwork of Dr. Palpu. He did not favour prohibition and held a sensible and modern perception towards liquor. He wanted that toddy should be made available to people in a hygienic way after removing the harmful contents to human beings in it. He visualized the potential of toddy as a viable alternative drink without causing any health problems. He also said that prohibition would deprive livelihood of a large number of people. He had even drafted a project to manufacture liquor in this line.²⁰³

²⁰² Editorial, 'Chettu Nirthanam' (Tapping Should be Stopped), *Desabhimani*, 19 & 20 August 1922 (Part I & II).

²⁰³ R. Sunil Kumar, 2004. *Dr. Palpu and Social Renaissance in Kerala* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Trivandrum, University of Kerala, p. 178, Also see *Dr. Palpu Papers, File No.4*. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, pp. 104 – 105.

As the agitation against liquor intensified, government invoked clause 90 of Travancore Criminal Procedure Code and arrested many prohibitionists. The most controversial one was the arrest of M. Madhavan, Secretary of anti-liquor agitation in Karthikapally taluk who was an Advocate at the Munsiff Court of Harippad on 9 November 1922. Government had violated all the procedures to be adopted in an arrest in this case. He was handcuffed and forced to walk 15 kms all the way from Ambalapuzha to Harippad. T. K. Madhavan unleashed a wide spread campaign against the arrest of M. Madhavan, which earned immense media attention, transgressing the boundaries of Travancore.²⁰⁴

Government documents regarding the prosecution of M. Madhavan shows some interesting details. The then Excise Commissioner, Mr. Van Ross, requested the government to sanction a sum Rs.250/- as a 'Special Secret Fund' to obtain witnesses in favour of prosecution against M. Madhavan and Govindan Channar of Alumootil. The letter also highlights the influence of Alumootil Channar family and the difficulty to get witnesses against them. In fact, he requested the government to release the amount to meet the 'expenditure' of the witnesses.²⁰⁵

Public meetings were held against M. Madhavan's arrest in Alappuzha, on 11 November 1922, in Kollam on 16 November 1922 and in Trivandrum on 21 November 1922. Finally he got bail on 11 December 1922 and subsequently got acquitted. The arrest and imprisonment of M. Madhavan and consequent campaign against it added good mileage to anti-liquor agitation.

Indian National Congress and Gandhiji took up the prohibition from the programmes of Indian Social Conference. S. Natarajan says that 'the Congress ministries determination to push ahead with prohibition was never in doubt despite the surprised protest of several sections of the community'.²⁰⁶ The

²⁰⁴ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit*, Vol II, pp. 440 – 41.

²⁰⁵ Confidential File No. 578 / 1922, Bundle No. 10, K.S.A. Trivandrum.

²⁰⁶ S.Natarajan, 1962. 'Picketing to Prohibition' in *A Century of Social Reforms in India*, New Delhi, Asia Publishing House, p. 166.

Anglo Indian Temperance Association, founded in London in 1888, published a magazine called *Abkari*, hailed the efforts of T.K. Madhavan. This association was instrumental in pioneering prohibition campaign in India also. T.K. Madhavan wrote *Haridasi*, an independent translation of a story originally written by Mrs. Leelavathy Kodilingam, espousing the cause of prohibition.

Government incurred huge revenue loss due to the agitation during the year 1921-22 as it expected excise revenue of Rupees 14 Lakhs but was able to realise only 10 lakhs. Ezhavas, the single largest community engaged in this business, suffered heavy loss to the extent of Rupees 70 Lakhs.²⁰⁷ The first stage of anti-liquor agitation came to an end when the report submitted by the excise commissioner recommending implementation of steps to initiate total prohibition in a phased manner was accepted by the government. The government appointed the excise commissioner to submit the report after Madhava Variyar moved the resolution in Travancore Legislative Council.

The prohibition campaign led by T.K. Madhavan during 1921-23 was a dress rehearsal of his entry into Indian National Congress. It created a space for Ezhavas of Travancore in the national political sphere which was mostly occupied by the upper castes. The stigma attached to Ezhavas who were contemptuously called as *Kottis* (Toddy Tapper) was also dwindled, though not completely wiped out. Madhavan conceived the agitation against liquor as the best opportunity to forge an alliance with the upper castes. This also paved the way for the community to get sanskritized. The sanskritization process taking place mainly centered in the cultural sphere. More pronounced impact of the agitation was the political integration of the community with the Indian National Congress which claimed to have the sole representation of the nation.

²⁰⁷ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, Vol II, p. 445.

Integration with Nationalism: Agitations for Freedom of Movement (*Sanchara Swatantryam*)

“..... Mahatmaji wants you to look upon
the so called untouchables as you do at cow and
the dog and other harmless creatures”.¹

C. Rajagopalachary - 27 May 1924, Vaikom

The struggle for freedom of movement (henceforth used as *Sanchara Swatantryam*) of the Avarnas took a major shift when T.K. Madhavan launched agitations in various places, the form of struggle being Sathyagraha. T.K. Madhavan who had been constantly championing the cause of the temple entry of Avarnas since 1918 climbed down from that demand and settled for *Sanchara Swatantryam* after 1924. It was his engagement with nationalist politics and attempts to mediate the cause of Avarnas particularly Ezhavas through the nationalist movement effected such a change.

This change had a tremendous effect on the socio political scenario of modern Travancore as it brought in a new discourse of negotiation between nationalism and oppressed castes. The temple entry movement had different dimensions and assumed varied proportions and it went beyond the expectations of T.K. Madhavan. (Complexities of this aspect have been discussed in the previous chapter). In general the ‘Temple Entry Movements of 1920’s for instance had the ironic effect of weakening *jatis* in its old form but of strengthening the Hindu community’.²

¹ George Ghee Varghese Joseph, 2003. *George Joseph: The Life and Times of a Kerala Christian Nationalist*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, p. 170.

² M. Muralidharan, ‘Hindu Community Formation in Kerala: Processes and Structures under Colonial Modernity’, *South Indian Studies* – 2, July – December 1996, p. 255. (The agitations for *Sanchara Swatantryam* viewed by the author like many others as movement for temple entry)

When the temple entry movement assumed a radical tone which went against T.K. Madhavan's conception of struggle he contemplated the idea of mediating the community's cause through the national movement. He was closely watching the developments within the national movement since the withdrawal of Non-Co-operation Movement (NCM) in early 1922. The incident at Chouri-Choura on 4 February 1922 prompted AICC to convene its working committee at Bardoli to discuss the future course of the movement. The decision of the working committee to withdraw the movement (12 Feb 1922)³ was a severe setback to the national movement. The British government allowed Gandhiji to lead the movement freely in the field till that time and finally arrested him on 10 March 1922. He was awarded a six years jail term but was released in February 1924. 'The crucial fact however' writes Sumit Sarkar, 'was that there was not a ripple of protest anywhere in India as Gandhiji went to jail'.⁴ The treatment of Chouri Choura by dominant historiographies shows how subaltern discourses are excluded. Sahid Amin observed, 'Most of the writers not bothered what really happened in Chouri-Choura but explained in terms of how a particular phase of nationalist movement came to an end'.⁵

National movement was plunged to its lowest ebb as a result of the withdrawal of NCM. Madhavan took it as an opportunity to start negotiations with the national movement, hoping favourable results. His attempts turned out to be successful. As the political programme of Gandhiji (NCM) failed to achieve its declared aim, i.e. 'Swaraj within a year', he preferred to take up anti-untouchability campaign as the main programme. The history of the national movement reveals that at times of political crisis, Gandhiji was of the habit of taking up the programme of the upliftment of the oppressed castes. Gandhiji and T.K. Madhavan had amazing similarity in this regard. When the temple entry

³ B.R. Nanda, 1958, Rpt. (1992). *Mahatma Gandhi, A Biography (Abridged edition)* Delhi, Oxford University Press (OUP), pp. 133 – 39.

⁴ Sumit Sarkar, 1983, Rpt. (1995). *Modern India 1885 – 1947*, Madras, Macmillan, p. 226.

⁵ Sahid Amin, 1995. *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922 – 1992*, Delhi, OUP, pp. 191 – 200.

agitation failed to achieve the results as expected by T.K. Madhavan he also redirected the course of agitation almost similar to the manner adopted by Gandhiji.

T.K. Madhavan led several agitations for *Sanchara Swatantryam* after endorsing Gandhiji's programme of anti-untouchability. The initiative of T.K. Madhavan received support from the Congress leadership and the progressive sections of caste Hindus in Kerala. Gandhiji's anti-untouchability programme did not include inter-dining and inter-marriage. He defended the non inclusion of these 'strictly on spiritual and hygienic grounds'.⁶

Madhavan's initiative received support from caste Hindus since they held the view that the move would save Hinduism from the threat of conversion. 'Moreover the conversion controversies are relegated to the background in the face of increasing hopes generated by Sathagraha (Vaikom) under the guidance of Gandhiji'.⁷

Temple entry or *Sanchara Swatantryam* was the chief bone of contention between Madhavan and Kumaran Asan during 1919 – 21. Kumaran Asan was severely hurt by the criticism of T.K. Madhavan and his supporters for not supporting the demand for temple entry and having limited Asan's demand only to *Sanchara Swatantryam*. Asan campaigned for *Sanchara Swatantryam* for several years utilizing all the means at his disposal. As a member in SMPA and later in Travancore Legislative Council (TLC) he consistently raised the issue and caused much embarrassment to government. His speech at TLC on 27

⁶ Mahatma Gandhi's Auto Script to T.K. Madhavan, *Desabhimani*, 1 October 1921. The following two lines in the auto script are deleted in *T.K. Madhavan's Biography* by P.K. Madhavan (VOL. I, p. 169), *Mr. Gandhi's opposition to untouchability does not extend to restraint upon interdining and inter marriage. He defends these strictly on spiritual and hygienic grounds'* (for the difference see Appendix III A and B)

⁷ M.S.A. Rao, 1979. *Social Movement and Social Transformation*, Madras, Macmillan, p. 67.

July 1920 deserves special attention in this regard.⁸ T.K. Madhavan who was highly critical of Asan during all those years finally came down to that demand.

T.K. Madhavan became an ardent supporter of Gandhiji and a sympathizer of Congress after his meeting with Gandhiji in September 1921, though he did not become a member of Congress officially at that time. Since then he never tolerated anybody who criticized Gandhiji. Moorkothu Kumaran tasted Madhavan's ire 'we have no other option but to reject the advice of Moorkothu Kumaran. We will neither listen to him nor agree with him who ridicules Gandhiji. Even if Ezhavas disagree with the programme of NCM, we will never agree with Kumaran'.⁹

By 1922 T.K. Madhavan became all powerful in SNDP Yogam. He was elected as Assistant Secretary of SNDP Yogam in 1921. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) held its meeting at the same venue where SNDP Yogam convened its 19th annual session (11-12 May 1922, Eramallore, Shertalai). SNDP Yogam had given its consent to KPCC to hold its meeting in the same venue. T.K. Madhavan was the chairman of the reception committee of this session of SNDP Yogam. In his presidential address Captain A.N.N. Panickar, IMS expressed his displeasure over this decision of SNDP Yogam and criticised Indian National Congress.¹⁰ But T.K. Madhavan's association with Congress was endorsed by the official leadership of SNDP Yogam.¹¹

Since of N. Kumaran took over as the General Secretary of SNDP Yogam in 1919, T.K. Madhavan's position within the Yogam was further consolidated and this facilitated him to act as the representative of Ezhavas to deal with the nationalists. Madhavan believed that an alliance with Indian

⁸ *Kerala Kaumudi*, 29 July 1920.

⁹ Editorial, 'Moorkothu Kumarante Adhyaksha Prasangam' (The Presidential Address of Moorkoth Kumaran), *Desabhimani*, 4 February 1922.

¹⁰ *Desabhimani*, 13 May 1922.

¹¹ P.S. Velayudhan, 1978. *SNDP Yoga Charitram* (History of SNDP Yogam), Qulion, SNDP Yogam, p. 219.

National Congress (INC) leadership would bring the desired effect. Though Kumaran Asan was able to differentiate and contextualize the pros and cons of such an alliance, T.K. Madhavan failed to do so. The linkage between national movement of this period and caste Hindu ideology is clearly analyzed by Sumit Sarkar. 'The trough between the two waves of major anti-colonial struggle, Swadeshi and non-co-operation Khilafat is now coming to be recognized as crucial for the development of high caste ideologies and activism that were in some ways constitutive of the Hindutva of the mid 1920s and later'.¹²

C.V. Kunjuraman through his paper *Kerala Kaumudi* opposed the idea of sathyagraha as a means to achieve the eradication of untouchability. This led to prolonged and hectic debates between *Desabhimani* and *Kerala Kaumudi*. SNDP Yogam adopted a resolution in its 20th annual session held at Quilon on May 1923 asking all Ezhavas to enter all public places without fear.¹³ *Desabhimani* and *Kerala Kaumudi* fought over the implication of this resolution. *Kerala Kaumudi* observed that the resolution never implied sathyagraha and it had got no official sanction.¹⁴ This was opposed by *Desabhimani* which upheld the programme of INC and the morals of sathyagraha.¹⁵ Indian Social Reformer (ISR) criticised Gandhiji on his advice to T. K. Madhavan on temple entry. Gandhiji was for individual sathyagraha and did not support mass entry. ISR asked Ezhavas to abandon the Hindu temples as they had their own temples. It urged them to put demands before the government to give grants for their temples as provided to caste Hindu temples.¹⁶ *Kerala Kaumudi* expressed doubts about the moral values of the sathyagraha principle. Citing Lewis Namier and other hard headed historians, Quentin Skinner writes, 'We need to be particularly suspicious of politicians

¹² Sumit Sarkar, 2002. *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Post Modernism, Hindutva, History*, Delhi, Permanent Black p. 81.

¹³ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.*, p. 220 ff 31.

¹⁴ *Kerala Kaumudi*, 25 July 1923.

¹⁵ *Desabhimani*, 25 September 1923.

¹⁶ *Indian Social Reformer*, 9 October 1921.

and other public figures who invoke high moral principles to explain their own behaviour'.¹⁷

T. K. Madhavan at Cocinada Session of INC (December 1923)

Having fully satisfied with the programmes of INC, T.K. Madhavan decided to pursue the cause of community in a larger platform and decided to attend the Cocinada session of AICC to be held in the last week of December 1923. He sought the help of Sardar K.M. Panikkar, a prominent national figure who then was the editor of *Swarajya* published from Madras and K.P. Kesava Menon the Secretary of KPCC. T.K. Madhavan justified the decision to attend the session in Cocinada as it would enable him to know the exact position of Congress towards the programme of eradication of untouchability. More over he was asked by the then Dewan Raghavaiah to leave Travancore if he thought it would help to get the Ezhava grievances redressed and Madhavan took it as a challenge.¹⁸ He was opposed to the view that 'Swaraj' was necessary only after resolving the social issues. C. Krishnan was of the opinion that Ezhavas should not associate with the Congress till the attainment of social freedom.¹⁹

T. K. Madhavan was denied permission to present the temple entry issue in the 1921 SMPA session. Moreover when the '*Murajapam*' festival was going on in the last week of November 1923, an Ezhava advocate P.N. Madhavan was asked to leave the court premises as the court was situated in the Fort area in Trivandrum. This incident caused wide spread resentment and T.K. Madhavan wanted to present the matter in the Congress also. In his draft memorandum, '*An appeal to the Indian National Congress on behalf of the untouchable castes*

¹⁷ Quentin Skinner, 2002. 'Moral Principles and Social Change' in *Visions of Politics, Vol. I, Regarding Method*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 145 – 46.

¹⁸ T.K. Madhavan, 'Kshetra Pravesana Vadam, Oru Charitra Avalokanam' (Temple Entry Demand, A Historical Analysis). The speech of T.K. Madhavan in Ochira on 21 November 1929 in *T.K. Madhavan Janma Satabdi Pathippu* (T.K. Madhavan Birth Centenary Volume), Yoganadam, 1985, Qulion, SNDP Yogam, p. 27.

¹⁹ K.K. Rahulan, 'Samoohya Viplavakari' (Social Revolutionary), *Yoganadam*, 1985, p. 74.

in India', Madhavan referred this incident as an example of the caste oppression practiced in Travancore.²⁰ This draft memorandum was later allowed to move as a resolution. Mathrubhoomi also took up this incident to illustrate the plight of Ezhavas in Travancore but seriously criticised C. Krishnan for opposing Indian National Congress and its nationalism.²¹ All these prompted Madhavan to attend the Cocinada session.

Madhavan's effort to solve the problems of his community with the help of national movement was in fact an unconscious act of putting the community behind INC. It weakened the process of community's independent development and assertions. But his actions were hailed and led to project him as a leader who differently perceived the problem of Ezhavas. Those who hailed Madhavan argued that Madhavan's primary concerns were nation and its interests and the absence of leaders like Madhavan would cost dear to the all round development of nation.²²

Major part of the deliberations of Cocinada session concentrated on the debate between Pro-changers (those who wanted change in Gandhiji's programme in the wake of political debacle since the withdrawal of NCM) and No- changers. The withdrawal and arrest of the prominent leaders including Gandhiji had in fact dampened the spirit of the session. Government report says 'even the forthcoming Congress at Cocinada appears to be arousing lesser public interest than it was expected and its promoters have said to be borrowed half a lakh rupees for expenses which they hope to recover from gate money

²⁰ *Mathrubhoomi* 'Congresum Kerlathile Thana Jathikkarum' (Congress and Lower Castes in Kerala), 19 January 1924.

²¹ V.R. Menon, 1973, Rpt. (1998). *Mathrubhoomiyude Charitram* (History of Mathrubhoomi), VOL. I, 1923 – 35, Calicut, Mathrubhoomi, p. 90.

²² Govindan Kutty Nair, 'Vargheeya Sanghatanakal' (Communal Organisation), *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*, 7 July 1946, p. 8 – 10.

when the Congress is in session'.²³ The low profile nature of this session was also attested by news papers like *The Hindu*.²⁴

T.K.Madhavan drafted the memorandum (*An appeal to the Indian National Congress on behalf of the untouchable castes in India*) and K.P. Kesavamenon circulated this among the members of the subject committee of AICC. T.K.Madhavan himself handed over a copy of the memorandum to Moulana Mohammed Ali, the President designate of the session. Moulana Mohammed Ali encouraged Madhavan and instilled confidence in him. T.K.Madhavan recalled later that if Moulana was not the President it would not have been possible to move the resolution.²⁵ Babu Vijayanath, T.K.Madhavan's son told this author that he was named after Mohammed Ali because of Madhavan's immense regard for him. The encouragement from Narayana Guru, Moulana Mohammed Ali and Mannath Padmanabhan in different ways helped him in his attempts to carryout his project.²⁶ It was Gandhiji who later changed his son's name as Babu Vijayanath.²⁷

Moulana Mohammed Ali, using his special power as the President of the session allowed Madhavan to move the resolution (Madhavan was not a member of Congress at that time). Despite the encouragements from Mohammed Ali, K.P.Kesava Menon and K.M. Panicker it was very difficult to catch the attention of the delegates in this regard. When Moulana asked Madhavan whether he intended to move the resolution at the time fixed for it,

²³ *Fort Nightly Reports 1923*, Tamil Nadu Archives (TNA), Chennai. [D.O. Letter No. 10630 – 1 Public dt 17 December 1923, From Acting Chief Secretary to Government of Madras to the Home Secretary to Government of India]

²⁴ *The Hindu*, 2 January 1924 in *History of Freedom Movement File No. 58/1924*, TNA, Chennai.

²⁵ P.K. Madhavan, 1936. *T.K. Madhavante Jeeva Charitam* (T.K. Madhavan's Biography), Vol.I, Trivandrum, M/s Sarada Book Depot., pp. 186 – 88.

²⁶ Babu Vijayanath, Interview with this author, at his residence in Ramapuram, Harippad on 25 September 2004. (When I first met Babu Vijayanath at Santhigiri Ashram, Pothencode, Trivandrum, he asked me whether I know his original name and said it was 'Mohammed Ali'.)

²⁷ Babu Vijayanth, 'Ormayude Malarkavile Aa Krishnakkal Pratima Mangi Poyi' (Memories of T.K. Madhavan), *T.K. Madhavan Pratima Satabdi Smaranika*, Vaikom, 1991, pp. 67 – 68.

Madhavan replied that it was not necessary to move the resolution as the programme of anti-untouchability had already been included in the agenda of the session.²⁸ The increased attention paid by INC to the eradication of untouchability is to be viewed in the context that 'there was a natural apprehension that these numerous and hitherto suppressed classes might look for political support from outside Hinduism'.²⁹

Though Madhavan's draft memorandum was circulated in advance among the four hundred members of the subject committee it evoked little interest. This does not mean that Madhavan's effort had not borne any impact. The real achievement was that Madhavan could personally convince many members of the gravity of the caste situation in Travancore. The Congress took a decision to grant powers to Provincial Congress Committees to chalk out necessary programmes and to implement them. Madhavan considered this decision taken by INC as his real achievement. He believed that the non-co operation of the depressed castes towards INC was the reason behind its apathy in carrying out the anti-untouchability programme. He wanted the oppressed communities to associate with the Congress to change its attitude. He earnestly felt that it was because of his efforts that KPCC took active interest in anti untouchability programme.³⁰ T.K. Madhavan had genuine apprehension towards KPCC as it had not pursued the anti-untouchability drive earnestly and he believed that his intervention effected radical change. At the same time he found it very difficult to contain the pollution practices followed even by some sections of Ezhavas. When Sree Narayana Dharma Poshini Samajam's 3rd annual conference met at Thripunithura (January 1923), Pulayas were not allowed in the conference hall. This conference was presided over by T.K. Madhavan himself. Pulayas were allowed in the hall only after

²⁸ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 184.

²⁹ Dieter Conrad, 'The Personal Law Question and Hindu Nationalism' in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Tradition and National Identity*, 1995. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich Von Steitencron (ed.), New Delhi, Sage, p. 312.

³⁰ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 191 - 92.

K. Ayyappan and M.K. Raman raised alarm over it.³¹

At Cocinada Madhavan met several leaders including Acharya P.C. Roy and apprised them of the magnitude of caste oppression suffered by the Avarnas in Travancore. Mathrubhoomi, the nationalist news paper published from Calicut, carried detailed reports on Cocinada session in its issues from 1 to 8 January 1924, but was silent on the draft memorandum prepared by T.K. Madhavan. Mathrubhoomi carried the full text of the conversation between T.K.Madhavan and Acharya P.C.Roy.³² Mathrubhoomi which started publication on 17 March 1923 paid scant attention to the movement of Ezhavas in Travancore under SNDP Yogam and entered into a duel with Mitavadi, edited by C.Krishnan as if it was the only threat to Mathrubhoomi.

T.K. Madhavan the Nationalist

Soon after coming back from Cocinada Madhavan enrolled as a member of INC and posed himself as a true nationalist. Madhavan was nursing a project of placing the community agenda into the national sphere. National politics in turn favoured this idea as this was a pre-requisite in imagining the nation. 'Statements about nation pre-supposes a unity: Nation is (imagined to be) in accordance with itself and its (imagined) essence, what ever that may be'.³³ The stress given to anti-untouchability by the Congress is to be viewed in the context of its political debacle suffered at that time.

T.K. Madhavan's speeches and writings in the early months of 1924 amply showed his maturity as a nationalist. He urged Ezhavas to rally under the banner of Congress, to observe non-violence and communal amity and maintain

³¹ *Desabhimani*, 13 January 1923.

³² *Mathrubhoomi*, 10 January 1924.

³³ Nizar Ahmed, 'A Note on Gandhi, Nation and Modernity' in *Social Scientist*, 396 – 397, Vol. 34, Nos. 5 – 6, May – June 2006, p. 50.

cordial relations with upper castes.³⁴ The call to his community had a clear message, he wanted Ezhavas to change the pattern of assertions they continued so far.

T.K. Madhavan took initiative to organise the anti-untouchability agitation by the Congress. In a brilliant analysis T.K. Ravindran in his seminal work, *Vaikom Sathyagraha and Gandhi* observed. 'T.K. Madhavan, who suffered at the hands of orthodox caste Hindus, was mainly instrumental for converting the social movement into a political agitation. 'Once it passed hands to the Congress, the leadership as a rule went to the educated Savarnas whose political leverage was enormous compared to that of lower classes'.³⁵ KPCC convened a meeting at Ernakulam on 20 January 1924 and formed an Anti-Untouchability Committee (AUC). T.K. Madhavan along with Kuroor Nilakantan Namboodiripad, T. R. Krishnaswamy Aiyar, K.P. Kesavamenon, and K. Velayudha Menon were among others enlisted as members and K. Kelappan Nair as Convenor.³⁶

The new initiative of T.K. Madhavan in tandem with Congress invited opposition from among the Ezhavas. C. Krishnan, K. Ayyappan and C.V. Kunjuraman were highly skeptical and they were against Satyagraha as a mode of struggle for eradication of untouchability. But the official leadership of SNDP Yogam, under N. Kumaran stood with T.K. Madhavan which helped him to receive considerable mileage within and outside the community. Madhavan was extremely critical of those who opposed his nationalist perceptions. But at the same time it is important to note the fact that *Desabhimani* gave enough prominence to the criticism against T.K. Madhavan in its pages.

³⁴ *Desabhimani*, Various issues in January and February 1924 (see for instance 9 February 1924 and 23 February 1924).

³⁵ T.K. Ravindran, 1975. *Vaikom Sathyagraha and Gandhi*, Trichur, Sri Narayana Institute of Social and Cultural Development, p. 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Major Struggles for *Sanchara Swatantryam*

The agitations for *Sanchara Swatantryam* in Travancore, led by T.K. Madhavan occupy an important place in the history of modern Kerala as it had its own role in democratising and modernising the society. These agitations for *Sanchara Swatantryam* started after Madhavan realized the fact that the agitation for temple entry would lead the community to a point of no return which Madhavan did not favour. His integration with the nationalist cause facilitated him to reorient the course of agitation from temple entry to *Sanchara Swatantryam* and he found that it was comparatively safe to keep away the Ezhava community from the grip of conversion. As a result of this change in the course of agitation, the demand for temple entry was relegated to the background, though it was not completely and formally abandoned.

Ezhavas were waging a relentless struggle for *Sanchara Swatantryam* right from the turn of the 20th century and as such the initiative of T.K. Madhavan cannot be seen as novel. But when we contextualise the agitations led by him it reveals that those agitations were being waged in accordance with the ideology of nationalism and that in fact blocked the subversive nature of the assertions hitherto continued. In these agitations emphasis was given to the same demand raised decades ago and that too with restricting the potentials of the self expression of the community.

Struggle for *Sanchara Swatantryam* assuming the form of Satyagraha revealed the indomitable hegemony of national movement over the oppressed castes. These agitations created a myth that the demands of the oppressed castes would be found expression only if their causes were mediated through the nationalist paradigm. Independent initiatives were discouraged in these agitations and the mobilization was to be from the above. Nationalists were able to mobilise the oppressed castes through these agitations. Anthony D. Smith

observes that the success of the new national community depended on the nationalists' ability to mobilize the Hindu population.³⁷

T.K. Madhavan earlier held that the temples were the abodes of untouchability and the entry of Avarnas into the temple would eventually root out untouchability. This position was diluted and the anti-untouchability campaign was confined to *Sanchara Swatantryam*. 'Untouchability as such went off at a tangent to the question of a civic right. The problem of caste disabilities would not have been solved even if those disputed roads were thrown open to all classes. The existence of thousand of miles of road in Travancore, open to all classes, did not, in any manner, mitigate the evil of unapproachability and untouchability'.³⁸

Poothotta Agitation

Vaikom Satyagraha was the most remarkable among the agitations for *Sanchara Swatantryam* and had deeper nationalist implication. The agitation at Poothotta was considered as a prelude to Vaikom. The Poothotta agitation led by T.K. Madhavan was carried out without the concurrence of the leadership associated with Vaikom Satyagraha. Madhavan started this agitation without much preparation and groundwork but it earned attention in a wide scale at a time when preparations for Vaikom Satyagraha were going on.

The village Poothotta in the northern part of Vaikom taluk was 25 miles away from Vaikom town. The temple at Poothotta was on the border between the states of Travancore and Cochin. Within one compound there were two temples. The temple at southern side (Vishnu temple) belonged to the Cochin royal family and the temple at northern side (Siva temple) belonged to the

³⁷ Anthony. D. Smith, 2004. *The Antiquity of Nations*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p. 89.

³⁸ T.K. Ravindran, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

Travancore government.³⁹ As part of his Vaikom campaign T.K. Madhavan traveled all over Travancore and reached Poothotta on 17 March 1924. He along with Kannan Tevan, a Pulaya by caste entered the compound of Poothotta temple and offered prayer at Siva temple.⁴⁰ It was not a deliberate action with the intention of violating the custom. We do not find any such campaign either from Anti Untouchability Committee (AUC) or from any other quarter. Therefore Thulasi Bhai's argument that 'during this time he decided to do something which would work as a bombshell to the orthodox hence he chose Poothatta temple'⁴¹ seems to be farfetched.

Local Savarnas and the temple priest organized protests and was reported the matter to Vaikom Group Devasowm Superintendent, K. Sankara Warriar who in turn conveyed it to the government. Devasowm Superintendent argued that the action amounted to sacrilege and recommended severe action against Madhavan.⁴² Temple authorities also filed a case before the District Magistrate Kottayam and pleaded action against T.K.Madhavan and Kannan Tevan under section 294 and 296 of Travancore Penal Code (TPC).⁴³ The complainant alleged that the two accused along with others entered the *Nalambalam* (buildings surrounding the sanctum sanctorum)) of the minor Siva temple at Poothotta and defiled the temple and consequently *pooja* ceremonies had to be stopped. The Savarnas pleaded that they were in dread of the consequences of the defilement of the temple and as such deterrent punishment should be awarded to the accused as enunciated in section 294 and 296 of TPC.⁴⁴ Upper caste mobilization became much visible in these areas since

³⁹ *Desabhimani*, 22 March 1924.

⁴⁰ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p. 345.

⁴¹ A. Thulasibhai, 'Poothotta Sathyagraha and T.K. Madhavan', *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. VI, part III & IV, September – December 1979, p. 563.

⁴² *File No. R. Dis 77/1926*, Office of the Devasowm Board, Trivandrum.

⁴³ Section 244 of TPC dealt with punishment regarding defilement of place of worship and section 296 with punishment to trespassers with the intention of wounding the religious feelings of others.

⁴⁴ *Desabhimani*, 'Poothotta Kshetra Pravesana Kesu' (Poothotta Temple Entry Case), 7 June 1924 and M.K. Narayanan, 'T.K. Madhavanum Kshetra Pravesana Prakshobhonavum' (T.K. Madhavan and Temple Entry Agitation), *T.K. Madhavan Pratima Stapana Smaranika*, 1991, Vaikom, p. 96.

Madhavan's entry in the temple premises, resulting in getting attention in a large scale to this incident.

The trial of Poothotta case before the First Class Magistrate Court, Kottayam began on 23 May 1924. T. K. Madhavan was brought from central prison, Trivandrum as he was convicted in cases related to Vaikom Sathyagraha. Madhavan was later transferred to Kottayam jail for the convenience of trial in Poothotta case. Details of the cross examination of prosecution witnesses were reported in *Desabhimani*.⁴⁵ The trial dragged on for many months mainly because T. K. Madhavan was absent on many occasion due to his other engagements. The case was disposed only after the conclusion of Vaikom Sathyagraha and the settlement followed. Government pleaded to withdraw the Poothotta case on 21 October 1925 and Judge C. Raman Thampi allowed the plea on 24 October 1925.

The Poothotta incident cannot be considered as a sathyagraha or a temple entry attempt as referred by *Desabhimani*. Madhavan's visit to this temple took place accidentally during his Vaikom campaign in northern Travancore. Had he entered the temple without the priest having noticed him, the incident would not have attracted attention at all. Madhavan's innate urge to enter the temple must be viewed as part of the internal conflict he experienced even after he succeeded to an extent in integrating the cause of Avarnas with the nationalist movement. He entered the *Nalambalam* of Poothotta minor Siva temple without the concurrence or knowledge of the leadership of Congress. 'T. K. Madhavan who spearheaded the adventure at Poothotta had no idea of entry the temple by force. He first wanted to make an attempt and sense the mood of the public especially of the caste Hindus'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Desabhimani*, 'Poothotta Kshetra Pravasenana Kesu' (Poothotta Temple Entry Case), 31 May 1924.

⁴⁶ Thulasibhai, *op.cit.*, pp. 564 – 65.

At about the same time a temple entry agitation by Nair community was going on at Poochakkal near Arookutty in Alleppey district. Here the Nairs were observing a satyagraha agitation for temple entry since early March 1924. Here one Krishna Pillai, a person belonging to Nair community forcefully entered the sanctum sanctorum of the local Bhagavathi Temple and offered prayer by beating the bell. This created considerable uproar in Poochakkal area.⁴⁷ Such incidents might have unconsciously influenced T.K. Madhavan to take a similar initiative at Poothotta. But his entry and consequent excitement over Poothotta incident convinced Congress leadership that Madhavan had enormous potential as an organizer and was able to mobilize public opinion in favour of Avarna castes. It also gave a message to his community that he was not completely controlled by Congress.

T.K. Madhavan's popularity had further increased by the Poothotta incident and proved as a morale booster. It also helped him to consolidate his position in Vaikom Satyagraha. This action also helped to break the lethargy of Ezhava community and its lack of enthusiasm towards Vaikom Satyagraha. In that way it was a great achievement for Madhavan.

Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-25)

17 Meenam 1099 – 14 Vrischigam 1101 M.E

[30 March 1924 – 29 November 1925]

The state of Travancore shot into the main domain of nationalist discourse by this satyagraha and the credit goes to T.K. Madhavan. This episode is one of the most discussed chapters in the modern Kerala history. It also earned wide attention in Indian history as the interest of nationalism was heavily involved in this agitation. The dominant historiographies celebrated it as an

⁴⁷ *Deshabhimani*, 22 March 1924.

important milestone in the history of 'Indian Renaissance', since 'the nationalist renaissance is viewed as the resurgence of Hinduism'.⁴⁸

The abatement of political activity and the setback suffered by INC since the withdrawal of NCM was largely overcome by its programme for eradication of untouchability and Vaikom was the first test ground. Thus Vaikom Satyagraha became instrumental in effecting an integration of social movements with national politics. The conflicts and contradictions inherent in the Hindu social order proved as deterrent factors in the integration of Avarnas into the cause of nationalism. The nationalist leadership decided to address this question and Vaikom Satyagraha grew out of this.⁴⁹ But this religion centered nationalism is not imagined in the traditional structure of religion; instead it exerted control over religion in tune with the changed circumstances.⁵⁰ The lead role of INC in Vaikom Satyagraha is to be viewed in these lines.

The dominant historiographic schools centered on nationalism vs colonialism paradigm which paid little attention to the assertions of oppressed castes and gave more importance to Vaikom Satyagraha. The Congress leadership took Vaikom Satyagraha as a suitable opportunity to divert the direction of the Avarna agitations. The stake of nationalism was very high in this satyagraha as it adopted the anti-untouchability programme. 'Anti-untouchability in its turn reduced a total and substantial agenda consisting of the struggle against ascriptive hierarchy of the mass of lower castes, to a nominal symbolic struggle for a minority of untouchable castes'.⁵¹

There was also controversy over the selection of Vaikom Siva temple to launch the satyagraha for *Sanchara Swatantryam*. The AUC of KPCC formed

⁴⁸ Meenakshi Mukharjee, 1985, Rpt. (1996). *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Delhi, OUP, p. 53.

⁴⁹ T.K. Ravindran, *op.cit.*, p.1.

⁵⁰ Sudipta Kaviraj, 1995. *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, New Delhi, OUP, p. 141.

⁵¹ G. Aloysius, 1997. *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, Delhi, OUP, p. 181.

after KPCC meeting at Ernakulam on 20 April 1924, decided to launch Satyagraha at Vaikom in a meeting of AUC held at Swarajya Asramam, Quilon on 6 February 1924. But K.M. Panickar stated in his autobiography that Vaikom had been selected at his instance while T.K. Madhavan stood for Haripad temple.⁵²

However T.K. Madhavan's son Babu Vijayanath had a different story to tell. He says that it was T.K. Madhavan's family's emotional attachment towards Vaikom temple that drove Madhavan to select it. The fact that T.K. Madhavan's paternal and maternal families were both Siva devotees also worked in favour of selecting Vaikom. Lord Siva was their traditional deity (*Moola Daivam*). Alumoottil Channars were very particular to have the *pooja* offerings (*Prathal*) from Vaikom Siva temple and it was sent to their home from the temple by some special arrangement as they cannot visit the temple. Moreover Alumoottil Channar bought a paddy field near to his *Tarawad* (ancestral house) which was named *Vaikathu Vayal* (Vaikom Paddy Field). They also built a *Thanner Pandal* (passengers' watershed) and a *Chumadu Thangi* (porters' rest) near the field. They bought the paddy field out of the income from the Abkari business in the Vaikom range. T. K. Madhavan's father and his elder brother were prominent Abkari contractors (*Kalal Kuthkakkal*) in northern Travancore and the Vaikom range was their monopoly. From Vaikom range they got maximum profit and believed that it was due to the blessings of *Vaikkattappan* (Lord Siva).⁵³ The official documents also revealed that Alumoottil Channars were prominent and influential Abkari contractors in north Travancore.⁵⁴

When temple boycott movement was launched by SNDP Yogam, it adopted ten practices (*Dasa Sheelangal*) to be observed by Ezhavas with regard

⁵² T.K. Ravindran, *op.cit.*, p. 52, ff.1

⁵³ Babu Vijayanath, Interview with the author at his residence, 25 September 2004

⁵⁴ Confidential File, No 578/1922, Bundle No. 10, KSA, Trivandrum.

to temples. One of the points was that Ezhavas should not accept offerings from the temples where they were denied entry, even if they were offered freely.⁵⁵

Attitude of Ezhavas towards Congress and its Programmes

The biggest challenge before Madhavan in Vaikom Satyagraha was the apathy of Ezhavas and he understood it well. A considerable section of Ezhavas felt that there was no need for launching a Satyagraha to remove untouchability and for that matter for *Sanchara Swatantryam* in the roads running round the temple. Knowing this T.K. Madhavan continuously urged Ezhavas to co-operate with the programmes of Congress and his passionate appeal to Ezhavas on the eve of the satyagraha is particularly noteworthy.⁵⁶ The biographer of T. K. Madhavan observed that the majority of Ezhavas were not in favour of the agitation to be launched under the leadership of KPCC. Prominent Ezhavas and his close friends dissuaded Madhavan but he was unrelenting.⁵⁷

Narayani Amma, wife of T. K. Madhavan said that even two months after the commencement of satyagraha the response of Ezhavas was far from satisfactory. Then she made an appeal to the Ezhavas to co-operate with the satyagraha movement in Vaikom.⁵⁸ Many SNDP Yogam workers expressed their displeasure about having an alliance with Congress.⁵⁹ Desabhimani did not conceal its anxieties in this regard. In its first editorial reporting satyagraha Desabhimani repeatedly sought the co-operation and solidarity of the Ezhavas and other communities.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ *Desabhimani*, 4 December 1920.

⁵⁶ *Mathrubhoomi*, 6 March 1924.

⁵⁷ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 232 – 33.

⁵⁸ Narayani Amma (Mrs.T.K. Madhavan), 'Thiyarude Sahakaranam Thripathi Karamalla' (Ezhava Co-operation is Not Satisfactory), *Desabhimani*, 7 June 1924.

⁵⁹ Saraswathy Amma, 'Chila Sathyanweshanangal' (Some Truthful Enquiries), *Malayala Manorama* (*Vaikom Sathyagraha platinum Jubilee Supplement*), 31 March 1999. Saraswathy Amma – Daughter of Kottukoyikkal Valayudhan, the biographer and close confidant of Narayana Guru, who actively participated in the Vaikom Sathyagraha.

⁶⁰ Editorial, 'Vaikom Sathyagraham', *Desabhimani*, 5 April 1924.

It was widely propagated that Narayana Guru whole heartedly supported the movement and some of the gestures of Guru indeed endorsed this view. He visited the Satyagraha Ashram in Velloor Matom, given to the movement for the purpose of satyagraha by him in October 1924. Kerala Kaumudi published a message of Guru on 27 June 1924 in which he whole heartedly supported the movement. He also endorsed the Gandhian programme of non-violence in the message.⁶¹ Similar views were shared by Mathrubhoomi also.⁶²

However when the staff reporter of Western Star interviewed Narayana Guru at Muttakkad, from where he issued the message to Kerala Kaumudi, he expressed certain reservations about the satyagraha on religious grounds. According to the report Guru was of the opinion that the satyagraha would not achieve its aim. The report quoted the Guru saying emphatically 'I shall not teach my children to start *Kshobham*'.⁶³ Writers like Robin Jeffrey also note the skepticism of Guru. 'A good number of Ezhavas were dissatisfied with passive tactics of INC and the views of Gandhiji on Varnashrama Dharma. There were also indications that Sree Narayana Guru himself showed in this, general skepticism'.⁶⁴

Whatever be the controversies regarding Narayana Guru's position it was a fact that Ezhavas were generally not in favour of satyagraha. They felt that as they were leading a relentless struggle for the same demand for a long time and there was no need to start a satyagraha under the leadership of Congress. Dr. Palpu in a letter to Gandhiji on 12 April 1925 observed, 'the right to walk through the public road is one that even dogs and pigs enjoy everywhere without having resort to any satyagraha at all. Besides that the

⁶¹ *Kerala Kaumudi*, 3 July 1924.

⁶² V.R. Menon, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

⁶³ *Western Star*, 29 July 1924, in *Confidential Section File No. 563/1924*, Trivandrum, K.S.A.

⁶⁴ Robin Jeffrey, 1978. 'Travancore: State, Class, and Growth of Radical Politics (1860 – 1940)' in Robin Jeffery (ed.), *People Princes and Paramount Power*, New Delhi, OUP, p. 155.

present satyagraha at Vaikom is only a year old, but our struggle has been going on for some centuries now, through out this coast, and as we are not organised at present and have no sympathy or support from outside, the suffering undergone have been enormous as can be realized from the results observable, i.e., the percentage of converts to other creeds etc'.⁶⁵ Here Dr. Palpu, the all time champion of Ezhava cause underscores the issues of conversion which always posed grave concern to the early leadership of SNDP Yogam.

Sahodaran Ayyappan also was opposed to satyagraha for achieving *Sanchara Swatantryam* in the road round the temples. He wanted that the Congress party should concentrate its efforts on temple entry of Avarnas.⁶⁶ Despite the all-out efforts of T. K. Madhavan the Ezhava community did not show any positive sign even on the day before the satyagraha started. KPCC and AUC were also aware of this general mood of the Ezhavas. C. V. Kunjuraman asked AUC not to start satyagraha till the decision of the Ezhava leaders became public. K. Kelappan, Secretary AUC recalled the tense moments prevailed in the satyagraha camp on 29 March 1924, a day before Satyagraha. 'Everybody was taken aback when C. V. Kunjuraman finally conveyed the decision of the Ezhava leaders not to favour the satyagraha'. T. K. Madhavan seemed quite unruffled as he expected such a decision. He instilled confidence into AUC and assured that Ezhavas would co-operate at a later stage and expressed full faith and confidence about the victory of satyagraha.⁶⁷

Vaikom Satyagraha: The False Propaganda

Vaikom Satyagraha is one of the most discussed and at the same time one of the most misinterpreted events of modern Kerala history. Right from the

⁶⁵ Dr. Palpu, Palpu Papers, Subject File No. 4, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML) Delhi, in T.K. Ravindran *op.cit.*, p.5

⁶⁶ *Desabhimani*, 29 March 1924.

⁶⁷ P.K. Gopalakrishnan, 'T.K. Madhavanum Rashtriya Prasthanavum' (T.K. Madhavan and Political Movement), *Yoganadam weekly*, *T.K. Madhavan Birth Centenary Issue*, 1985, pp. 54 – 56.

beginning it was made out to be a movement for temple entry. This false attribution was due to its close association with the national movement. Attempts of lower caste people in using public roads forbidden to them were interpreted as struggles for temple entry. This misinterpretation was deliberate and it helped the local Congress leadership to block the spontaneous assertions of Ezhavas. Most of the works available on Vaikom Sathyagraha term it as a movement for temple entry. A book on this line was published even at the time of sathyagraha. The book styled as a dossier describes the sathyagraha as a war of independence (*Swatantrya Yuddham*).⁶⁸ Sadhu M.P. Nair brought out a more comprehensive account on similar line, before the sathyagraha ended.⁶⁹ Leading sociologist A. Aiyappan also considered it as a movement for temple entry led by T.K. Madhavan.⁷⁰

This wrong interpretation gained wide currency and dominated most of the discussions on Vaikom Sathyagraha. Those who wrote about Vaikom Sathyagraha in international journals also propagated this view. 'There were numerous agitations for temple entry rights by lower castes, mostly by Ezhavas; the most famous of being the Vaikom Sathyagraha in which Gandhiji participated'.⁷¹

However, T.K. Ravindran in his brilliant study of Vaikom Sathyagraha situated it correctly and analysed its manifold implications threadbare. He wrote 'T.K. Madhavan considered right to walk through public road is a civic right. He considered as and when temple roads are thrown open to all, temple entry of Avarnas will be achieved. Vaikom was selected for achieving the right

⁶⁸ C.K. Nambiar, 1924. *Swatantrya Yuddham* (War of Independence), Tellicherry, Vidya Vilasom Press, pp. 1 – 33.

⁶⁹ Sadhu M.P. Nair, 1925. *Vaikom Sathyagraham (Mal.)* Pullukulangara, Mavelikkara, *Passim*.

⁷⁰ A. Aiyappan, 1965. *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village*, New Delhi, Asia Publishing House, p. IX.

⁷¹ Cyriac .K. Pulapilly, 'The Izhavas of Kerala and their Historic Struggle for Acceptance in the Hindu society', *Journal of Asian and African studies* XI, 1-2, 1976, pp.32-33.

to pass through the temple roads'.⁷² George Joseph, the Congress leader who actively participated in the satyagraha wrote later, 'Vaikom Satyagraha has nothing to do with temple entry. The issue was whether untouchables should be prevented from going along a private road maintained by the state'.⁷³ His presence caused much embarrassment to local Congress leadership and Gandhiji.

The Satyagraha

From the very beginning Gandhiji and K.P.C.C tried to make the entire movement an internal affair of the Hindus alone, though they could not effectively prevent the participation of other sections. But Gandhiji was very particular in this regard and he declared 'the aim of Vaikom Satyagraha is only to achieve accessibility to roads round the temple'.⁷⁴ The pledge to be undertaken by the satyagraha volunteers also clearly indicated it as an affair of Hindus. The volunteers had to affirm that she/he was a Hindu and that she/he should observe strict non-violence and comply with the government orders.⁷⁵

The confusion prevailed for sometime and after prolonged parleys and discussions at many levels finally the satyagraha started on 30 March 1924 (*17 Meenam 1099 M.E*)

T.K. Madhavan traveled all over Kerala as a part of Congress deputation campaign and made repeated appeals to Ezhavas to co-operate with the satyagraha. The Congress deputation reached Vaikom on 29 Feb 1924 and

⁷² T.K. Ravindran, 'T.K. Madhavanum Vaikom Sathyagrahavum' (T.K. Madhavan and Vaikom Satyagraha) *Yoganadam weekly* 1985, p.50.

⁷³ George Joseph, *Indian social Reformer*, 30 January 1932.

⁷⁴ K.P. Kesava Menon, 'Satyagraha Smaranakal' (Satyagraha Memories), *SNDP Yogam Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (Hereafter called SY GJS), 1953, Quilon, SNDP Yogam, pp.91-92.

⁷⁵ Pledge of Satyagraha Volunteers, *Vaikom Sathyagraha Commemoration Volume*, (Hereafter called VSCV) Vaikom, Sukumaran Moolakattu, Convenor, Vaikom Satyagraha Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1977, p.63.

addressed a Pulaya gathering, convened for mobilising their support.⁷⁶ There was uproar in the meeting as Pulayas opposed using satyagraha as the mode of agitation and the Gandhian programmes to achieve the end. Mathrubhoomi which reported the meeting was silent on the protests by Pulayas.⁷⁷ The meeting was reported as a casual one as it was not based on a pre drafted plan by the Congress deputation campaign.⁷⁸ A meeting was convened in Calicut on 11 March 1924 when the deputation reached there. Here also Madhavan fervently appealed to Ezhavas to extend their solidarity with the satyagraha. But Manjeri Ramayyer, who also spoke in this meeting, ridiculed satyagraha and asked all Tiyyas (Ezhavas) to embrace Buddhism for achieving social liberation.⁷⁹

On 30 March 1924 Satyagraha volunteers led by T.K. Madhavan and others marched towards the prohibited roads. They were stopped by the police. The Kottayam Dt. Magistrate had already issued prohibitory orders under relevant sections of Travancore Criminal Procedure Code and served notice to T.K. Madhavan, A.K. Pillai, K. Velayudha Menon and K.P. Kesava Menon. As decided by the leaders, three volunteers, Kunjappi (Pulaya) Bahuleyan (Ezhava) and Govinda Panicker (Nair) advanced towards the roads. They were arrested and sentenced to six months simple imprisonment and sent to Trivandrum central prison.⁸⁰ Mathrubhoomi tried to project the satyagraha as a united movement of all Hindus. Mathrubhoomi expressed its exasperation in an editorial kindling the passions of Hindus, 'a patriotic Hindu cannot but feel ashamed as the Hindu government keeps Hindus away from the roads near a Hindu temple'.⁸¹

⁷⁶ *Mathrubhoomi*, 6 March, 1924.

⁷⁷ N.K. Jose, 1994. *Vaikom Satyagrahthile Satyangal* (Truths of Vaikom Satyagraha), Vaikom, Hobby Publications, pp. 15-24.

⁷⁸ K.P. Sankara Menon, 1953. *Keralathile Samudayika Pariskarana Prasthanam* (Community Reform Movements in Kerala), Trichur, Mangalodayam, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁹ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 223-26

⁸⁰ *Confidential Section File No. 605/1924*, KSA, Trivandrum.

⁸¹ *Mathrubhoomi*, 3 April 1924.

The satyagraha provoked Savarnas and they tried to thwart the movement. They spread rumours that a Nair- Ezhava clash was impending and this created much panic among the public. The AUC suspended the satyagraha for some days. Meanwhile K.P. Kesava Menon received a letter from Gandhiji in which he also asked to suspend the satyagraha. Gandhiji wrote this letter at the behest of two Iyer brothers, Shivarama Iyer and Vancheeswara Iyer, who met Gandhiji at Juhu in Bombay and apprised him that the roads in question belonged to private persons.⁸²

The AUC decided to resume satyagraha on 7 April 1930. T.K. Madhavan and K.P. Kesava Menon were arrested on that day when they violated the prohibitory orders. They were sentenced to six months imprisonment and sent to central prison as they declined to execute the surety bonds.⁸³ On the previous day of his arrest T.K. Madhavan issued an emotionally charged message which was full of nationalist fervour in which he once again asked the Ezhavas to get integrated with the INC and the national movement.⁸⁴ Madhavan's integration with INC made him so dear to the nationalists and they appropriated Madhavan accordingly. 'Madhavan felt that the experience of being oppressed as a citizen of a slave nation was more oppressive than being oppressed as an Ezhava on the basis of caste'.⁸⁵

In his statement to the magistrate also Madhavan observed that being a Hindu he felt ashamed of this discrimination and lauded Gandhiji and his programmes.⁸⁶ T.K. Madhavan appeared here as the spokesperson of INC, leaving no room for any doubt on his integrity towards the cause of nationalism.

⁸² *The Hindu*, 4 April 1924.

⁸³ *Confidential Section File No.563/1924*, KSA, TVM.

⁸⁴ *Mathrubhoomi*, 24 April 1924.

⁸⁵ Govindan Kutty Nair, 'Vargheeya Sanghatanakal' (Communal Organizations), *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*, 7 July 1946, p.8 & 10.

⁸⁶ *V.S.C.V.*, 1977. p.79.

It is to be noted here that Madhavan had already walked through the prohibited roads rounds the Vaikom temple during November 1920 and that too after giving prior notice to the authorities. Sahodaran Ayyappan and others had also passed through these roads but the government had not initiated any action against Madhavan or Ayyappan. In fact government tried to hush up the incident so as to avoid purificatory ceremonies in the temple. When the police reported the actual matter to government it instructed the authorities to reverse the report as if nothing of that sort had happened.⁸⁷ Madhavan dared to walk through the prohibited roads on the strength of the sacrifice of his community.

The independent initiatives of the community effected enormous changes. On the other hand the nationalist leadership under Gandhiji discouraged any such move here. They wanted to keep the Avarnas in the Hindu fold and claimed themselves as the champions of the oppressed castes. Ambedkar's famous opposition to Gandhiji and Congress was precisely at this point. He leveled logical criticism against Gandhiji. While Gandhiji endorsed and supported Vaikom Satyagraha, he vehemently opposed sathyagraha of Dalits in Mahad and Nasik during the same period, waged against untouchability. Ambedkar asked why this double standard and he clarified that Gandhiji opposed the satyagraha in Mahad and Nasik because they were independent initiatives of the untouchables, while in Vaikom it was organized by Congress which was under the complete control of Gandhiji.⁸⁸

Gandhiji considered eradication of untouchability as a pre-condition for Swaraj. But Ambedkar took it as a ploy of Gandhiji to create an illusion in order to carry out his cherished dreams which were basically detrimental to the oppressed castes.⁸⁹ Ambedkar further considered the programme of removal of

⁸⁷ P.K.Madhavan, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, pp.219-20 & T.K. Ravindran *op.cit.*, p.57.

⁸⁸ B.R. Ambedkar, 2000. *Dr.Ambedkar Sampoorna Krithikal* (Dr.Ambedkar Complete Works) Vol. X, Trivandrum, Kerala Language Institute, pp.216-17.

⁸⁹ B.R. Ambedkar, 1945. *What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables*, Bombay, Thakar & Co.Ltd., p.38.

untouchability by the Congress is insincere 'Congress did nothing beyond giving formal recognition to this problem. Had it been sincere it would have surely made the removal of untouchability a condition like wearing khaddar for becoming a member of Congress'.⁹⁰

In Vaikom Satyagraha Gandhiji was against the participation of the followers of other religions despite their commitment to the cause. Gandhiji was particularly against the participation of George Joseph, an arch nationalist simply because he was a Christian. Gandhiji wrote a letter to George Joseph on 6 March 1924 'As to Vycom I think you should let the Hindus do the work. It is they who have to purify themselves. You can help by your sympathy and by your pen and not by organising the movement and not by offering satyagraha. If you refer to the Congress resolution of Nagpur, it calls upon the Hindu members to remove the cause of untouchability. I was surprised to learn from Mr. Andrews that the disease had infected even the Syrian Christians'. George Ghee Varghese Joseph wrote, 'the implication of the last sentence is Gandhiji was advising George Joseph that if he wished to participate in a campaign against untouchability he should do within his own community. It is clear from K. M. Panikkar's autobiography that he [Panikkar] was behind the campaign to remove George Joseph from the leadership'.⁹¹ But before the letter reached George Joseph he was arrested and this adversely affected the satyagraha. He was exceptionally remarkable in organising the agitation. The letter from Resident of Travancore, C.W.E. Cotton to the Chief Secretary to Government of Madras clearly proves this; 'that with Mr. Joseph out of the way the (Vaikom) movement might collapse altogether for none of the other leaders seems to have any idea or drive'.⁹²

⁹⁰ Dhananjay Kheer, 1961. *Ambedkar, Life and Mission*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, pp.165-67.

⁹¹ George Ghee Varghese Joseph, *op.cit.*, p.166.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.169, see also T.K. Ravindran, *op.cit.*, pp. 101-07.

The oppressed castes viewed the activities of Congress with suspicion as they have gained nothing out of its activities in Travancore by that time. Gandhiji's position on caste is very clear and need not be elaborated here again. But Rajagopalachari pronounced this in an unsympathetic manner at a meeting in Vaikom on 27 May 1924.

'Let not the people of Vycom or any other place fear that Mahatmaji wants caste to be abolished. Mahatmaji doesn't want the caste system done away with but holds that untouchability should be abolished. Mahatmaji doesn't want you to dine with Tiyyas or Pulayas, what he meant is that we must be prepared to touch or go near other human beings as you touch and go near a cow or a horse. I was standing out the barricade today.... A cow crossed the line under the barricade. The constables were looking fiercely at the volunteers but the cow was allowed to go on. A dog came in but nobody disturbed it. Mahatmaji wants you to look upon the so called untouchables as you do at cow and dog and other harmless creatures.'⁹³

Gandhiji even asked an apology from George Joseph for his participation in satyagraha, and that was declined. George Joseph took the view that since a civic right was denied to untouchables it was as much his concern as that of Hindus to fight for it.⁹⁴

The arrest and imprisonment of T.K. Madhavan and others generated further enthusiasm among the masses and helped to gain support to the movement. Even C. Krishnan who vehemently opposed the movement changed his stand since the arrest of Madhavan.⁹⁵ While delivering the presidential address in the 22nd session of SNDP Yogam on May 1925 he said Vaikom Sathyagraha had brought into light, the magnitude of untouchability in Travancore, however he added 'Vaikom also revealed us enough that how far we can achieve through satyagraha and similar methods. The aim to be achieved still lies far away'.⁹⁶

⁹³ George Ghee Varghese Joseph, *op.cit.*, p.170.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.172.

⁹⁵ *The Hindu*, 5 May 1924.

⁹⁶ *Desabhimani*, 23 May 1925.

The government adopted a strategy to defeat the morale of satyagrahis by not arresting them. They were forced to observe satyagraha in extremely hostile climates. The AUC contacted Gandhiji to get his approval to begin fasting, but he declined it and elaborated the ethics and morality involved in satyagraha.⁹⁷ The fortnightly report of the Madras government observed that the sathyagraha had lost a good deal of its intensity since Gandhiji informed the satyagrahis that they need not stay on duty in the streets beyond the limit of physical endurance.⁹⁸

The participation of leaders and people from outside Kerala made this satyagraha famous. The Akalis from Punjab and leaders like E. V. Rama Swamy Naikar, Dr. Emperumal Naidu and Ayyamuthu Gounder were some of them who actively participated in the movement and courted arrest. Their relentless efforts made the movement live and helped the Sathyagraha to get wide attention. All its credit went to Indian National Congress and the Congress downplayed the role and importance of outside help. The community kitchen (*Langar*) organised by the Akalis from Punjab became a model of communal harmony and social equality. When the Ezhava community realised their aim was not achieved even after the conclusion of satyagraha, conversion surge once again gripped the community. This time many Ezhavas in central and northern Travancore adopted Sikh religion.⁹⁹ The service rendered by the Akalis during the Vaikom Satyagraha made such lasting impacts. The Ezhavas who converted to Sikh religion had boldly entered the sanctum sanctorum and temple tank at Vaikom and also ventured into Shertalai temple. The matter was reported by the District Magistrate to the Dewan, who observed it as 'Bad News'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ C.N. Somarajan, 1986. *Role of Gandhi in Vaikom Sathyagraha*, Kundara, Quilon, Raj Publications, pp. 19-21.

⁹⁸ 'D.O.Ltr.No.4105-1 dated 16/04/1924' (Strictly Confidential), *Fort Nightly Report for the first half of April 1924*, TNA, Chennai.

⁹⁹ *Judicial Department File No.2945/1936*, KSA, Trivandrum.

¹⁰⁰ 'Letter No.244/11 dated 14/05/1993' from T.H.Cameron to the Dewan, Huzur Secretariat, Trivandrum in *Judicial File No.2945/1936*, KSA, Trivndrum.

The leaders from outside Travancore severely criticized the Travancore King,¹⁰¹ who was regarded in high esteem next to God by all including the oppressed castes. When a reporter asked T.K. Madhavan to comment on the remarks against the king, he unequivocally said that they were against the ideology of Congress. He said that he as well as his followers were pained by the remarks and appealed all to desist from such deplorable gestures.¹⁰² Madhavan further briefed the reporter that he felt extremely happy when a group of Ezhavas raised the slogan '*Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai*' at Quilon railway station. The mob gathered at Quilon station to see Madhavan. He also added that if the Congress and untouchables were united '*Bharath Matha*' would be liberated.

Orthodox Hindus in connivance with police unleashed terrible violence and physically attacked the satyagraha volunteers several times. In the last week of June 1924 a satyagrahi lost his eye sight in such an attack.¹⁰³ Apart from these physical attacks they also started rigorous counter propaganda and even launched a newspaper to denounce the agitation and particularly Ezhava community.¹⁰⁴ Reports of satyagraha and the attacks on satyagrahis by the Savarnas appeared in all most all newspapers of South India and they were attested in the fortnightly reports of Madras Government.¹⁰⁵ When the correspondent of Associate Press interviewed Pitchu Iyengar, Assistant Superintendent of Police, Kottayam, he said, police had been handicapped in

¹⁰¹ T.K. Ravindran, *op.cit.*, pp.113-16.

¹⁰² *The Hindu*, 28 May 1924 and P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.271-278.

(This interview took place at Kottayam railway station on 14 May 1924 when Madhavan was brought from Trivandrum central prison to Kottayam to produce before Kottayam Magistrate in connection with the Poothotta Case)

¹⁰³ *Desabhimani*, 'Savarna Hindukkalude Akramangal' (Violence of Caste Hindus), 5 July 1924.

¹⁰⁴ *Dharma Prasthanom*, 19 July 1924, KSA, Trivandrum

¹⁰⁵ 'Letter.No.53/0-1, dated 16-05-1924', *Fort Nightly Reports in the First half of May 1924*, TNA, Chennai.

making investigation in the absence of complaints from the victims, who as satyagrahis refused to put in the statements.¹⁰⁶

T.K. Madhavan and others were released from prison on 1 September 1924 to mark the occasion of Rani Sethu Lekshmi ascending the throne following the death of Travancore King, Sri Moolam Thirunal. T. K. Madhavan reached Vaikom on 3 September 1924 and participated in a meeting of KPCC in Cochin on 6 September 1924. Madhavan was nominated as one of the members of KPCC. He left for north India to meet Gandhiji in Delhi and held discussion with him on 18 September 1924 along with George Joseph and K. M. Panikkar. T.K. Madhavan campaigned for the cause of satyagraha while he was in north India.

AUC held its meeting at Vaikom sathyagraha Ashram on 9 October 1924, presided over by T.K. Madhavan. The committee decided to organise a Savarna Hindu *Jatha* to press the demand of the Satyagraha and to submit a memorandum to Regent Maharani. Two *Jathas* were organised one starting from Vaikom and other from Nanjinad in Southern Travancore respectively led by Mannath Padmanabhan and Dr. Emperumal Naidu. The two *Jathas* converged at Trivandrum and submitted a memorandum which was signed by twenty five thousand caste Hindus on 13 November 1924. Changanassery Parameswara Pillai submitted the memorandum to Regent Maharani.¹⁰⁷ Regency declined to offer anything and asked to wait till the fate of the *Sanchara Swatantryam* resolution to be moved in the Travancore Legislative Council.

T.K. Madhavan attended the Belgaum session of INC held in December 1924 in his capacity as the member of AICC. In this session Congress adopted a resolution demanding freedom for everyone to pass through the public roads. It

¹⁰⁶ *The Hindu*, 12 May, 1924.

¹⁰⁷ V.R.Menon, *op.cit.*, p.111.

was after much persuasion of T.K. Madhavan that Gandhiji gave his nod to move the resolution. This carefully worded resolution tried to protect the Savarna interest or was at least careful not to cause any misunderstanding or ill feeling to them.¹⁰⁸

The *Sanchara Swatantryam* resolution was moved by N. Kumaran (SNDP Yogam General Secretary) the nominated Ezhava member in Travancore Legislative Council on 5 February 1925. The resolution was put to vote after three days debate and was defeated by one vote. It was P. Parameswaran the brother of Dr. P. Palpu who voted against the resolution.¹⁰⁹

Desabhimani wrote a strong and indignant editorial on the very day the motion was defeated. It chided N. Kumaran for having accepted the nomination to the Council. Kumaran was nominated along with P. Parameswaran by the government. Desabhimani viewed that though the motion was defeated it was a great victory since the Nair members voted in favour of the motion. To the surprise of its readers the editorial concluded with this observation 'If the satyagraha to be continued further, then the aim should not be confined to throwing open the roads but it should be extended to temple entry'.¹¹⁰

The AUC had not taken any step in this direction as wished by the editorial of Desabhimani since the aim of satyagraha was pre-defined. Instead of demanding the change of aim of satyagraha through the editorial of Desabhimani, T.K. Madhavan should have raised this issue within the KPCC and AUC. But that possibility was practically zero since he was an avowed nationalist and true follower of Gandhiji. Moreover Madhavan clarified his

¹⁰⁸ Editorial, Congressum Ayithochadanavum' (Congress and Eradication of Untouchability), *Desabhimani*, 3 January 1925 & 'Belgaumil Vaikom Sathyagraham' (Vaikom Sathyagrah in Belgaum), *Desabhimani*, 10 January 1925.

¹⁰⁹ *Travancore Legislative Council Proceedings*, 7 February 1925, pp. 812-13.

¹¹⁰ Editorial, 'Sanchara Swatantrya Prameyam' (Resolution of Freedom of Movement), *Desabhimani*, 7 February 1925. Note: Voting on this resolution took place on 7 Feb 1925 and *Desabhimani*, dated, 7 February 1925 might have come out on the next day after including the news item regarding the fate of the resolution.

position when a press reporter interviewed him at Trivandrum on 10 February 1925. The reporter asked his comment on the defeat of the motion; he replied 'the leader of Vaikom Satyagraha is the most revered Mahatma Gandhi. I am only a volunteer who executes his orders',¹¹¹ giving no scope for pursuing the concluding observation of Desabhimani's editorial dated 7 February 1925.

In a strongly worded editorial T.K. Madhavan expressed his anger and condemned the action of Parameswaran in maximum possible terms. In fact T.K. Madhavan and others camped in Trivandrum and canvassed for the resolution and they even pleaded with Parameswaran also.¹¹² On knowing the defeat of the *Sanchara Swatantryam* resolution in the Council, the Ezhava leaders hurriedly convened a meeting of the community at Kanjiravilakom temple premises in Pettah, Thiruvananthapuram and decided to ostracise Parameswaran from the community. Expecting an Ezhava backlash the government ordered police protection for his house to prevent any untoward incident. Kerala Kaumudi also wrote a long and indignant editorial rebuking the action of Parameswaran.¹¹³

Gandhiji at Vaikom

Gandhiji arrived at Vaikom on 9 March 1925 and it was a much celebrated affair. T.K. Madhavan looked after the itinerary of Gandhiji. Prior to his arrival Desabhimani published an editorial which hailed the visit as a result of the heartfelt prayers of 27 lakhs of Avarnas in Travancore. It added that Travancore government's eyes were cataracted due to its partiality in favour of Brahmins and Gandhiji's visit would give a treatment to this blindness. It urged the people to make the visit a grand success.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Deshabhimani*, 14 February 1925.

¹¹² Editorial, 'Bodhyamaayi' (Convinced), *Desabhimani*, 14 February 1925.

¹¹³ *Kerala Kaumudi*, 13 February 1925.

¹¹⁴ Editorial 'Mahatmajikku Swagatham' (Welcome to Mahatma Gandhi), *Deshabhimani*, 8 March 1925.

The first day after his arrival Gandhiji met Indanthurithil Neelakantan Namboodiri, the unyielding leader of the orthodox Hindus to change the stand of Savarnas who opposed the entry of Avarnas in the roads running around the temple. Indanthurithil refused to meet Gandhiji at Satyagraha ashram where he stayed. Indanthurithil reported to have said that those who wanted to meet him should go to him.¹¹⁵ Gandhiji yielded and the meeting was arranged in an out-house in the compound of Indanthurithil's residence (*Mana*). It is also reported that he was reluctant to sit with Gandhiji inside his *Mana* as Gandhiji belonged to *Bania* caste. (In the *Varna* order the *Bania* caste comes under *Vaisya*) The Savarnas requested not to publish the proceedings of the meetings to press, and what was available, taken by the government reporters and it was handed over to the government. 'The document is self explanatory. The rank caste fanaticism expressed there in strong words by the orthodox leaders will find no parallel in recent history. Their villainy was let free and it ran amuck in the presence of Gandhij'.¹¹⁶

Gandhiji's plea to Indanthurithil was rigorously questioned on the basis of Holy Scriptures. Indanthuruthil rejected Gandhiji's stand by quoting elaborately from Hindu Sastras. Gandhiji also quoted from the same text, but his efforts did not make any impact. Gandhiji's argument appeared rather weak before Indanthurithil's contentions. Indanthuruthil emphatically declared that they followed what Sankaracharya said and not any other *Acharyas*. He further added that with regard to customs (*Mamool*) they followed the *Tantra Samuchayam* and nothing else. Indanthurithil was well versed in Hindu religious literature and there Gandhiji stood nowhere near him. 'The scene closed with Gandhiji taking his departure reciting a verse from *Bhagavat Gita*, to which Indanthurithil replied by reciting another *Sloka* from the same place.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ V.S.C.V, 1977, p.212.

¹¹⁶ T.K. Ravindran, *op.cit.*, p.164. (The entire text is reproduced in pp.164-194).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.191

'Indanthurithil' henceforth became synonym of an obstinate person in Malayalam language.

The dialogue between Gandhiji and Savarna leaders repeatedly exposed the mindset of Hindu colonialists, who always tried to legitimise their oppression on the basis of religious texts of Hinduism dealing with custom. B. R. Ambedkar was quite right in his observation 'it is their *dharma* that equips them to legitimise their oppression'.¹¹⁸ Gandhiji later met Mr. Pitt, the Police Commissioner of Travancore and held discussion regarding the Vaikom Satyagraha which finally led to calling off the satyagraha on 23 November 1925.

T.K. Madhavan continued his campaign towards the cause of the agitation and he was also engaged in other agitations meant for *Sanchara Swatantryam*. When the satyagraha was to complete a year, in a passionate appeal, T.K. Madhavan urged the people to organise the event befittingly to observe the first anniversary of the agitation. He appealed to the ruler of Travancore to throw open all public roads to all sections.¹¹⁹

Disillusionment of Ezhavas: Method and Counter Strategies

Some of the Ezhavas who lost hope in achieving the aim and disgusted with the satyagraha movement, decided to convert to Christianity. After converting to Christianity they publicly walked through the roads where the entry was prohibited. One Madhavan an Ezhava who belonged to Thumbamon, near Omallore converted to Christianity and freely walked through the roads. This caused much embarrassment to T.K. Madhavan and his followers. To discuss the issue a meeting of Pathanamthitta Taluk Ezhava Samajam was

¹¹⁸ B.R. Ambedkar, *op.cit.* No.88, p.188.

¹¹⁹ Editorial, 'Meenam 17 Orkkane' (Remember Meenam 17), *Desabhimani*, 28 March, 1925. (Vaikom Sathyagraha started on 17 Meenam 1099 M.E, i.e. 30 March 1924)

convened in which T.K. Madhavan also participated. The meeting stated that conversion to another religion was not a solution and even if they did so they would not be allowed to walk through the roads.¹²⁰ It was indeed a setback to the Ezhava leadership and T.K. Madhavan who sought to redress the social grievances through the programmes of Congress. This prompted the meeting of the Pathanamthitta Taluk Ezhava Samajam to deny the facts and reality in a pityful manner.

A very crucial turn to conversion debate took place while Vaikom sathyagraha was going on. During this time Arya Samajists came to the forefront of agitation against untouchability and posed themselves as the champions of the oppressed castes in Travancore. This militant Hindu organization always opposed conversion and they took very aggressive postures against Christian missionaries and Islam.¹²¹ It is indeed the rapidly increasing scale of conversion from the ranks of depressed classes that invited the Hindu reformers to stand against the missionaries.¹²²

The initiatives of the Arya Samajists were clearly intended to arrest the conversion surge among the Ezhavas. We have already seen their attempts during the temple entry and boycott movement of Ezhavas, but it miserably failed then. Though the Arya Samajists attacked Brahmins for causing superstitions in Hindu society, the alternative social model proposed by Dayananda Saraswathi was based largely on traditional- mainly Brahminical world view.¹²³ Arya Samajists claimed that they were not Hindus but 'Aryas'. When census operation of 1891 started, this demand was in vogue particularly where they were strong, especially in Punjab.¹²⁴ They themselves started *Suddhi*

¹²⁰ Deshabimani, 2 May 1925.

¹²¹ Sumit Sarkar, *op.cit.* No.4, pp.74 -76.

¹²² Duncon B. Forrester, 1980. *Caste and Christianity, Attitude and Policies of Caste of Anglo Saxon Protestant Mission in India*, London, Curzon Press, p.160.

¹²³ Christophe Jefferlot, 1999. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics- 1925 to the 1990's*, New Delhi, Penguin, p.15.

¹²⁴ Kenneth W. Jones, 'Religion Identity and Indian Census' in N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *The Census in British India: New perspectives*, 1981. New Delhi, Manohar, p.87.

movement to re-admit Hindus, who had converted to Islam and Christianity and they had carried out it in a vigorous and varied manner according to the situation demanded.¹²⁵

When Satyagraha movement plunged into lethargy and showed no tangible results, the discontent among the Ezhavas ran high and the conversion again came as an option. It was at this moment that the Arya Samajists ventured into the scene which even invited the displeasure of Narayana Guru.

Swami Shraddhananda visited Kerala several times, stayed here for long duration during Vaikom struggle and coordinated the efforts of Arya Samajists. He even offered that Hindu Mahasabha would lead the satyagraha in the event of Congress abandoning the movement.¹²⁶ They made some intervention at Kalpathy, in Palakkad where also the freedom of movement of Avarnas was restricted. T.K. Madhavan also visited the place and actively associated in the movements of *Sanchara Swatantryam* there.¹²⁷ Shraddhananda blamed Brahmins for the decline of Hinduism and invited Ezhavas and other oppressed castes to join Arya religion. He further assured that once converted to Arya religion their position would be same as that of upper castes. Believing the utterances, some Ezhavas converted to Arya religion and tried to walk through the prohibited roads in Vaikom, only to be returned as they were obstructed by upper castes.

Shraddhananda addressed a meeting in Quilon on 22 November 1925, a day before satyagraha was officially called off by the AUC. Speaking in chaste English he appealed all to work for upholding '*Hindu Dharma*'. The speech lasted two hours and throughout his speech he attacked the life styles of Hindus prevalent at that time and asked people to go back to olden day's practices. 'The power and machismo of Hindus lost' because of the current life style, he

¹²⁵ Kenneth W. Jones, 1994. *Socio-Religious Reform Movement in British India*, New Delhi, Foundation Books, pp.100-01.

¹²⁶ *Deshabhimani*, 17 May 1924.

¹²⁷ Editorial 'Kalpathy Bahalam' (Kalpathy Uproar), *Deshabhimani*, 25 November 1924.

lamented. Dewan Peischar Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer also spoke on the occasion.¹²⁸

Shraddananda then met Narayana Guru at Varkala Sivagiri *Matom*. He said he came to Guru to receive his blessings. Instead of responding to the visitor's wish Narayana Guru asked about Kalpathy developments. Shraddananda then asked that he was eager to know about the activities of Guru in the direction of the upliftment of untouchables. Narayana Guru sarcastically showed his displeasure over the question and said 'We (I am) not doing any thing'. Shraddananda insisted Narayana Guru to issue a declaration asking people to join Arya Samaj to which Guru only said "We have no objection". That's all. No declaration or statement was issued.¹²⁹ The representation of Hinduism through Shraddananda was the clear manifestation of the maneuvering capabilities of Hinduism.

The entire movement of Vaikom Satyagraha bore a strong Hindu tint. It discouraged participation or help from outside to preserve the character of the movement, dictated by Gandhiji and Congress. The declared aim of the satyagraha was to achieve *Sanchara Swatantryam*, but Hindu community imagination and religious propaganda became the core of the programme. The satyagraha camp and its operations also had Hindu religious overtones. The satyagraha committee organised Hindu religious meetings regularly. The daily bulletin published by the satyagraha publicity bureau announced the arrival of K.P. Krishnan Namboodiri on 18 April 1925. Krishnan Namboodiri arrived on 25 April 1925 and stayed in satyagraha *Ashram*. He delivered lectures every day regarding the sin of untouchability. In the satyagraha *Ashram* a special Namboodiri cook was appointed to prepare food for him.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ *Desabhimani*, 25 November 1925.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Desabhimani*, 2 May 1925.

The leaders who controlled the satyagraha strongly discouraged any spontaneous initiatives of the people. Strict and total adherence to non-violence left no room for such initiatives. K.Ayyappan rigorously questioned the efficacy of satyagraha and also criticised those who adhered to complete non-violence. Ayyappan made a strong criticism against K. Kelappan, Secretary of AUC. He observed that, Kelappan didn't even have a primary understanding of the social history of Keralam and for that matter even about the struggles for eradication of untouchability or *Sanchara Swatantryam*. Ayyappan further added that it was not after Vaikom Satyagraha but before it C.Krishnan defied the notice board and walked through the prohibited roads leading to Tali temple in Calicut. Even in Vaikom four persons violated the order and walked through the prohibited roads in broad daylight and that was also not after Vaikom Sathyagraha. He also reminded Kelappan that it was through riots and violence that Avarnas achieved some gains. After mentioning a series of riots he concluded, 'riots of these hue would lead to the eradication of untouchability from Kerala better than ten Vaikom Satyagrahas'.¹³¹

Conclusion of the Satyagraha and its Flaws

The struggle for basic civic rights including *Sanchara Swatantryam* waged by the oppressed castes had a long history and it started decades before Vaikom Sathyagraha. In this direction they went ahead a long way and when the national movement was allowed to intervene in the struggle, the result was that the advances made by Avarnas so far got deflected and even the aim to be achieved was not realized.

The AUC withdrew the satyagraha on the basis of prolonged parleys and discussions especially between the Police Commissioner and Gandhiji. The final settlement arrived on its basis and accordingly the agitation was officially

¹³¹ K.Ayyappan, 'Samamo Sahasamo' (Conciliation or Adventurousness), *Desabhimani*, 19 September 1925.

withdrawn on 23 November 1925. The settlement with the government was All the roads round vaikom temple with the exception of two lanes leading to eastern approach road, one from the south and the other from north were open to all classes without distinction. At a short distance from the eastern *Gopuram* a gate was put up inside which people would be admitted only for purpose of worship in temple. All the approaches to the portion of the lane which was now withdrawn from the public use and which was hitherto being used as a thoroughfare by sufferance of the Devasowm Department were guarded by doors which would remain shut except during hours of service in the temple. It was also declared that the enclosed portion would be open neither to Christians and Mohammedans nor to Hindus who had not got the right of worship in the temple nor even to a caste-Hindu except during hours of service. A new road was to be constructed joining the eastern approach to the northern road for the convenience of the public.¹³²

The satyagraha committee made it public that all roads round the Vaikom temple were thrown open to everyone for unrestricted movement and this was a gross misrepresentation of facts. On 29 November 1925 AUC convened a public meeting and a large number of people attended it. The meeting adopted a resolution (No.1) which said "In view of the fact that government have thrown open all roads in Vaikom to all citizens irrespective of caste and creed and they follow no individual distinction in their use. Having been achieved the aim of satyagraha, this meeting approved the decision of the AUC under the instruction from Mahatmaji to dissolve the satyagraha *Ashram* and demobilize the volunteers thereof from today onwards".¹³³ By distorting truth through this resolution AUC did grave injustice to Avarnas.

The meeting was presided over by E.V. Ramaswamy Naiker (EVR) in which K. Kelappan, T.K. Madhavan and Mannathu Padmanabhan spoke. EVR said he came to watch the proceedings of the meeting and not to preside it, but he was forced to chair it as Kelappan compelled him to do so. EVR known as

¹³² T.K.Ravindran, *op.cit.*, p.203.

¹³³ *Deshabhimani*, 'Vaikaom Sathyagraha Mahayogam' (Grand Meeting of Vaikom Sathyagraha), 9 December 1925.

Vaikkom Veerar (Vaikom Hero) contradicted Gandhiji on several issues, particularly on the question of eradication of untouchability. 'The Vaikom Satyagraha, in fact, marked an important moment in Periyar's (EVR) political life, defining as it did his inexorable difference from his peers in Tamil Nadu Congress.¹³⁴

T.K. Madhavan said, 'We have started satyagraha not to achieve *Sanchara Swatantryam* in Vaikom alone but to achieve the end of untouchability as such'. He made attacks on *Pattans* (Tamil Brahmins) and added that as untouchability disappeared from the public it took shelter in temples and the need for temple entry was essential. Madhavan never elaborated the details of the settlement arrived with the government but eulogized Gandhiji and his interventions.¹³⁵

T.K. Ravindran rightly observed, 'after twenty months of relentless fight, the Congress withdraw from the scene with its finery torn, and its prestige tarnished, leaving the causes of the depressed classes at the same spot whence they picked up in March 1924'.¹³⁶

The Vaikom Satyagraha considerably helped in bringing the oppressed castes under the control of the nationalist movement and that changed the sense of direction gained by the Kerala society. The observations of C. Krishnan and K. Ayyapan deserve special attention here. They held the view that national movement was the political form of caste Hindu interest. When we map the Vaikom Satyagraha, it appears that the political Hinduism firmly footed its grip over the upturned soil of Kerala. The inalienable relation between nation and Hinduism became more evident by this satyagraha. The formation of Indian

¹³⁴ V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, 1998. *Towards a Non Brahmin Millennium*, Calcutta, Samya, pp.300-01.

¹³⁵ *Desabhimani*, 9 December 1925.

¹³⁶ T.K.Ravindran, *op.cit.*, p.204.

National Congress is supposed to be the beginning point of the Hindu religion expressing its political sentiments and interests.¹³⁷

Ambalapuzha Agitation: July-August 1925

The agitation for *Sanchara Swatantryam* in the roads round the Ambalapuzha Sreekrishna Swamy temple unravels the efforts of nationalist forces to block and wreck the process of self representation of Avarnas. This shows the victory of nationalization process which discouraged the multiple identities and their self assertions in the name of national unity. The national leadership realized that the interest of nation would be at stake if the assertions of Avarnas let unbridled and they were also aware of the fact that 'without whose participation its idea of territorially defined Hindu nation would not gain the necessary legitimacy'.¹³⁸ The national identity was created with the construction of religious traditions.¹³⁹ Facts reveal that when the national movement was unable to impact any influence in the social milieu of Travancore, the Avarna assertions could make much headway.

Ambalapuzha Sreekrishna Swamy temple remained a centre of tension between lower castes and the caste Hindus right from the turn of the 20th century. It is one of the most prominent major caste Hindu temples in Travancore. While reporting the court case relates to the satyagraha in Ambalapuzha, *The Hindu* observed, 'Sri Krishna Swamy temple in Ambalapuzha, Travancore state is one of the most famous temples of Kerala, where devout Hindu worshippers throng from all parts of India to offer their devotion and prayer to the deity. It is a temple founded on ancient Hindu religious tenets of *Varnshrama Dharma* or Four Caste (*sic*) of Hindu scriptures

¹³⁷ Brian K. Pennington, 2005. *Was Hinduism Invented: Britons, Indians and Colonial Construction of Religion*, New York, OUP, p.7.

¹³⁸ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 2004. *Caste, Culture and Hegemony Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal*, New Delhi, Sage, p.192.

¹³⁹ Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich Von Steitencron, 1995. *Representing Hinduism: The construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, New Delhi, Sage, pp.17-32.

(Brahmin, Kshatrya, Vaisya and Sudra) with a fifth submerged class (*Pathitha*) whose approach meant pollution to the deity and to the worshippers as per plaintiff.¹⁴⁰

In Ambalapuzha Sreekrishna Swamy temple even the approach road and pathways leading to the temple were inaccessible to Avarnas. Many riots took place between caste Hindus and Avarnas over the question of *Sanchara Swatantryam* prior to the agitation in 1925. The latest initiatives of Avarnas under Ezhavas started during the Vaikom Sathyagraha, which indeed influenced the newfound enthusiasm.

The latest agitation was more organized and it started purely at the spontaneous initiative of local Avarna leadership. It sought support and solidarity from the AUC. The plea was turned down and the local leadership was asked to maintain restraint. T.K. Madhavan wanted to have a co-ordination between the two and tried for it. But the AUC of Vaikom discouraged him. KPCC and AUC put tremendous pressure on Madhavan and let him involve in Ambalapuzha only as a mediator to pacify the Avarna leadership. The KPCC and AUC leadership tried to defuse the tempo and enthusiasm generated by the local leadership.¹⁴¹

The agitation in Ambalapuzha was organised and led by P.M. Kunjuraman, a native of Quilon who was a volunteer in Vaikom Sathyagraha. P.M. Kunjuranam was disbanded from the volunteer group without any valid reason by the AUC. The AUC on the other hand leveled allegation against him for having organized the agitation in Ambalapuzha. The AUC had downsized the volunteer corps after the agreement reached between Gandhiji and the police commissioner. In Ambalapuzha, P.M. Kunjuraman received considerable

¹⁴⁰ *The Hindu*, 10 January 1928.

¹⁴¹ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.321

support from the Araya community and their leader, Azhikkakathu Arumukam Aandi Arayan, who was also in the forefront of the agitation.¹⁴²

The local leadership in Ambalapuzha formed an anti-untouchability committee with P.M. Kunjuraman as its secretary. He informed the authority about the procession of Avarnas to be held on 4 July 1925 to force the government to throw open the roads outside the Ambalapuzha temple to them. Authorities held talks with Kunjuraman and urged him not to complicate the situation as the government was contemplating measures to settle the Vaikom issue and requested him to postpone the procession. In consultation with other leaders, Kunjuraman agreed to postpone the procession for another fifteen days.¹⁴³

Taking advantage of the compromise arrived between Kunjuraman and government authorities, the AUC of Vaikom sathyagraha intervened. In a letter to the editor in *Desabhimani*, Changanasery Parameswara Pillai asked the Avarnas not to go ahead with the proposed procession on 19 July 1925. He said the procession would complicate the matters of Vaikom and added that if the Vaikom question was solved all other issues would be sorted out.¹⁴⁴

As news of the proposed procession got wide publicity and popular attention, *Desabhimani* wrote an editorial against the move. It emphatically said the proposed procession had no sanction from the AUC of KPCC. It further clarified that there was no need for such an action and urged the leadership to desist from the move.¹⁴⁵ This editorial clearly showed the attitude of AUC of KPCC in which T.K. Madhavan had an important role.

¹⁴² *Desabhimani*, 25 July 1925.

¹⁴³ Thulasibhai, 1986. *History of the Agitation for Temple Entry in Kerala*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Trivandrum, University of Kerala.

¹⁴⁴ C. Parameswara Pillai, 'Ambalapuzha Kshetrapathayum Sanchara Swatantryavum' (Ambalapuzha Temple Paths and Freedom of Movement), *Desabhimani*, 18 July 1925.

¹⁴⁵ Editorial, 'Ambalapuzha Karyam' (Regarding Ambalapuzha), *Desabhimani*, 18 July 1925.

The Ambalapuzha agitation really shattered the plans of AUC leadership. The leadership of AUC felt that the agitation was moving out of its control. This reminds us the case of 'Guntur' where a no tax campaign started without the concurrence of Gandhiji during the Non-Co-operation Movement. T.K. Madhavan and KPCC played here the roles of Gandhiji and INC respectively.

The authorities closely watched the developments. W.H. Pitt, the Police Commissioner of Travancore wrote to the Chief Secretary to Government on 14 July 1925 in which he hoped that such a procession would not take place and if it materialized he would ban the procession and arrest the leaders.¹⁴⁶ Despite the hope of government and the hostility of AUC of Vaikom, P.M. Kunjuraman and Andi Arayan went ahead with the plan of holding the procession on 19 July 1925. AUC termed it as adventurous and harmful to the interest of Vaikom Satyagraha and deputed T.K. Madhavan to Ambalapuzha to thwart the move.

T.K. Madhavan along with K.M. Krishnan, an advocate from Alappuzha reached Ambalapuzha on 17 July 1925 and met Arayan and Kunjuraman. Madhavan and Krishnan tried their best to persuade Arayan and Kunjuraman to defer the proposed procession. After long discussions and much persuasion they yielded and the matter was communicated to the authorities. On 18 July 1925 Andi Arayan issued a notice to the public in this regard. The Quilon district magistrate in a letter dated 19 July 1925 to the Chief Secretary to government clearly attested the pain taken by T.K. Madhavan and N. Kumaran, General Secretary SNDP Yogam in averting the proposed procession.

Mr. T.K. Madhavan, who had hastened from Mundakkayam to Ambalapuzha to stop the proposed procession in the event of materializing it. He explained at a public meeting held in the local town hall last evening the mistake of local Avarnas in attempting to organize such a move without support of Gandhii, the Vaikom satyagraha committee and the leaders of Savarna

¹⁴⁶ Thulasibhai, *op.cit.*, p.130.

and Avarna communities of Travancore and said they had now realized the folly of such an attempt.¹⁴⁷

The Magistrate further sent a telegram which reads '*No procession or any other trouble. Everything Quiet*'.¹⁴⁸

Desabhimani gave a report of the meeting at town hall in which T. K. Madhavan observed that there would not be any satyagraha anywhere till a solution be arrived in Vaikom. He further clarified that this was the decision of the Vaikom Satyagraha committee. However the Desabhimani report added that though the move was stopped then considering the situation, there was every possibility of a resumption of the agitation.¹⁴⁹

Desabhimani's apprehension proved correct. On 17 August 1925 under the leadership of Andi Arayan, the Avarnas marched through the prohibited roads. The march was conducted after giving prior notice to the authorities. The march was attacked by Savarnas and several marchers suffered injuries. T.K. Madhavan arrived there immediately and actively engaged in bringing the situation under control. Temple authorities met Madhavan and urged him to use his good office to persuade the Avarnas not to use the road at least during the *pooja* hours. Finally the status-quo was re-established but the Savarna pride suffered a severe jolt.

The case against Arayan and others who ventured into prohibited road continued for many years in the District Magistrate Court, Alleppy. In a preliminary judgment, the District and Sessions Court Judge, Ramasubba Sashtrikal delivered in January 1928, he observed 'As it is at present the Chovas (Ezhavas) would not allow Arayas and Pulayas to come near them, while

¹⁴⁷ Confidential file No. 722/1925, Bundle No.13, KSA, Trivandrum.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Desabhimani, 'Satyagraham Niruthivechu' (Satyagraha Stopped) 25 July 1925.

Sudras feel polluted by the approach of the alleged '*Pathithas*' (those who were excommunicated). I think the *Melkoima* (sovereignty) would think that it would be time enough to alter the present rule of temple worship and entry, when Sudras and *Pathithas* have all merged into one solid community without any difference'.¹⁵⁰

National movement always wanted to picture Avarnas as a section incapacitated for self representation and thus justified its intervention. This intervention blocked the natural growth and development of the oppressed castes. T.K. Madhavan, the great champion of Ezhavas played such a role in Ambalapuzha only because of the pressure from KPCC and AUC of Vaikom. The socio-political equation derived during the Vaikom Satyagraha badly affected the process of self representation of oppressed castes. The first victims of the Vaikom Satyagraha were Ezhavas, Arayas and Pulayas of Ambalapuzha. There was an exceptional unity between Ezhavas, Arayas and Pulayas in Ambalapuzha. With the Ezhavas, the Pulayas and Arayas steadfastly rallied against the age old social inequalities. Ambalapuzha agitation was the price paid by Avarnas for having accepted the leadership of Congress and Gandhiji.

Parur- Kannankulangara: September 1925

Parur- Kannankulangara Sreekrishna Swamy temple which claims great tradition is one of the major temples in north Travancore currently under the administration of Travancore Devasowm Board. In the road round the temple Avarnas were denied entry as both sides of the roads were inhabited by Brahmins (*Agraharams*) 'It is widely held that the Kannankulangara temple is more than two thousand years old'.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Special Correspondent, 'Ambalapuzha Sathyagraha Temple Pollution Case', *The Hindu*, 10 January 1928.

¹⁵¹ *Deshabhimani*, 19 September 1925.

Kannankulangara temple had a curious history associated with Christianity. It is believed that Parur, near Kodungallore is the first place where St. Thomas arrived in the 1st century A.D to propagate Christianity. The first Christian church in Kerala is believed to have been constructed here. The legend says this temple once belonged to a *Namboodiri Illam* (residence of a Namboodiri Brahmin). The 'head of the Illam' (*Karanavar*) had had an encounter with St. Thomas (*Thoma Sleeha*). Inspired by the supra human powers of St. Thomas, the *Karanavar* himself converted to Christianity. This story had wide currency in this area. The Roman Syrian church at Parur, commonly called *Kodakkaly* church, one of the churches in Kannankulangara is believed to have been constructed under the supervision of St. Thomas. It is also believed that this church was built at a place where a temple existed.

In front of the *Kodakkaly* church an idol of a Namboodiri wearing a sacred thread was installed. During the temple festival of Kannankulangara, the idol was taken to the temple and offered prayer and then installed back to the church premises. It is said that after converting to Christianity the Namboodiri asked St. Thomas this favour and it was promptly accepted.¹⁵²

During the last quarter of 19th century a dispute between local Christians and the Brahmins came up over the use of temple roads of Kannankulangara. The court was put into a tight corner as it had to decide whether the road in question was *Rajapatha* (Kings Highway) or *Gramaveethi* (Village road or thoroughfare). In Travancore there were two types of roads namely *Rajapatha* and *Gramaveethi*. The former was opened to all classes of His Highness' subjects without any distinction of caste or creed, at least by law. On the other hand the latter's use was restricted. Local custom and usage alone should

¹⁵² *Deshabimani*, 'Paravoor Visheshangal' (Parvoor Special News) 10 October 1925.

determine its use. This notion was upheld by Travancore High Court when the dispute came up in the court, in the year 1888.¹⁵³

Justice Sita Rama Iyer pronounced the verdict with these concluding words, 'at present we are bound to respect the custom of the country and administer the general law of the land'.¹⁵⁴ Here in this connection it is relevant to mention the horrible practice followed in highways also. The authorities obstructed Pulayas and other lower castes to walk through the Kings highway from Cantonment to Ulloor in Trivandrum.¹⁵⁵

Discontent ran high among the Avarnas, especially Ezhavas, who constituted a sizeable population in Parur, over the denial of freedom of movement in the roads round the Kannankulangara temple. It gathered momentum during September 1925. Among the local Ezhava leaders who organized the agitation in Kannankulangara, there were those who had already associated in the Vaikom Satyagraha. They felt highly disappointed over the way in which the satyagraha movement was conducted. Unlike in Ambalapuzha the AUC of Vaikom found it very difficult to contain the spirit of Ezhavas in Kannankulangara. The Ezhavas of Kannankulangara were thoroughly dissatisfied with Vaikom Satyagraha and it is evident from the fact that Bahuleyan, one of the first volunteers arrested in Vaikom Satyagraha on 30 March 1924 itself, was in the forefront of the agitation in Kannankulangara.

T.K. Madhavan's participation was very active and highly positive in Kannankulangara. The Ezhava estrangement was so deep in Kannankulangara and the stake of the community was very high here. Over and above the pressure from local Ezhavas were very strong which T.K. Madhavan could not

¹⁵³ *The Travancore Law Reports*, 1896. Vol. V, pp 93-112. (Reprinted with the permission of Travancore Government by S. Aiyadurai Aiyar, High Court Vakil, Trivandrum, Keralodayam Press)

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.401 (The verdict was delivered by the Full Bench of the Travancore High Court, in Case, A.S. No.77 & 78. on 30 July 1888 by Judges, T. Kunhiraman Nair & A. Sitarama Iyer)

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.99.

resist. By this time Vaikom Satyagraha committee became unpopular among the Ezhavas who felt dejected as no tangible solution was in sight. The AUC of KPCC received severe criticism from various quarters for taming the independent initiatives. Apart from all these factors the lower caste upsurges for *Sanchara Swatantryam* visible in various places had also created a very conducive atmosphere for T.K. Madhavan to involve more freely in Parur Kannankulangara.

T.K. Madhavan arrived in Parur on 11 September 1925 and held discussions with Ezhava leaders of the movement. Led by the Ezhavas, the other Avarna sections had also decided to enter the road round the Kannankulangara temple. The matter was communicated to G. Sankaran Potti, Devasowm Group Superintendent, Parur. T.K. Madhavan also wrote a letter to R. Krishna Pillai Devasowm Commissioner of Travancore.¹⁵⁶

Authorities hurriedly invited T.K. Madhavan and others for a compromise talk. In this talk it was decided to redraw the distance of pollution (to what extent the Avarnas could enter into the streets). The distance of pollution was calculated taking into account of Pulaya community for which Ezhavas denied the freedom they previously enjoyed. There were wide spread opposition noticed over this arrangement. Finally it was decided to postpone the entry to the prohibited roads by a day, pending the arrival and decision of Devaswom Commissioner.¹⁵⁷

Details of this discussion and the arrangement arrived on its basis were available in the letter dated 14 September 1925, by T. Kesavamenon, Assistant Devaswom Commissioner to R. Krishna Pillai, Devaswom Commissioner, Travancore.¹⁵⁸ By this new arrangement the freedom of the Ezhavas further

¹⁵⁶ *Desabhimani*, 10 September 1925.

¹⁵⁷ *Desabhimani*, 17 September 1925.

¹⁵⁸ 'Entry of Avarnas in Parur Agraharam', *Confidential Section File No.673/1925*, KSA, Trivandrum.

eroded. Desabhimani's observation in this regard proved to be correct when we go through the official records.¹⁵⁹

Savarnas raised objection to these arrangements too, as they found a little freedom was granted to Avarnas in the paths lying eastern and southern sides of the temple. They sent telegrams to Maharani Regent and Dewan expressing their protest. They also gave complaint to Dewan Peischar C.K. Mathan, who tried to effect a further compromise but it also failed. As he failed to convince Brahmins he asked T.K. Madhavan to postpone the march for another fifteen days, which was summarily rejected.¹⁶⁰ T.K. Madhavan felt that the attitude of C.K. Mathan was highly partisan and arrogant. Latter in a meeting T.K. Madhavan criticized Mathan and expressed displeasure over his behaviour.¹⁶¹

On 14 September 1925 a strong posse of Ezhavas and others led by T.K. Madhavan marched towards the entry point of *Agraharam*. Brahmins got together and prepared for a showdown and they tied a rope across the way to prevent the Avarna entry into the street. Marchers led by T.K. Madhavan along with Bahuleyan (Volunteer who courted arrest on the first day of Vaikom Sathyagraha) went through the *Grama Veethi* on the Eastern side, where they were stopped. Then they returned and repeated the march in the other two sides, only to be obstructed again. Finally when they started marching through the western side towards the *Agraharam* streets it caused quite a commotion as Brahmins tried to prevent the Avarnas from entering the *Agraharam*.¹⁶² All law enforcing authorities including District Magistrate were present at the venue. The District Magistrate persuaded T.K. Madhavan to stop the march but he did not obey. Marchers were determined to move forward and at this point District

¹⁵⁹ Confidential Section File No.673/1925, KSA, Trivandrum.

¹⁶⁰ Avarna Hindukkal Agraharathil Pravesichu. (Non Caste Hindus Entered into Agraharam), *Desabhimani*, 17 September 1925 and Confidential Section File No.673/1925, K.S.A, Trivandrum

¹⁶¹ P.K.Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 325-29.

¹⁶² *Desabhimani*, 17 September 1925.

Police Superintendent, B. Nanoo Pillai appealed to the Brahmins to allow the march to pass through. He then made a long speech in which he justified T. K. Madhavan and his followers and said the action of Brahmins ran against religious ethics and royal authority. No amount of appeal bore any effect on Brahmins and the police finally used mild force to disperse the Brahmins and the marchers then entered the streets.¹⁶³ Savarnas lodged a complaint in Parur District Court and on behalf of Avarnas, lawyer P.K. Kumaran filed a complaint in the same court. P.K. Kumaran listed various aspects of the grievances of the Avarnas and argued that there was no ground in obstructing them to pass in the said roads.¹⁶⁴

The court case continued for sometime. Meanwhile Ezhavas mobilized public opinion through numerous campaigns. To conduct the Kannankulangara *Agraharam* case and help to achieve the eradication of untouchability, an anti-untouchability fund was started. It was decided that each home in that area should contribute four *Annas* (equal to 25 paise) to the fund and by the end of October 1925 an amount of rupees two thousand was mobilized. The Parur court issued an injunction order in favour of the respondents (Ramanatha Iyer, Sachidananda Iyer and others) prohibiting T.K. Madhavan and others from entering into the *Agraharam* roads.

Avarnas organized a huge meeting in Parur on 10 January 1926 in which K. Ayyappan, Swamy Sathyvrathan and Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai spoke. Changanasseri Parameswara Pillai was designated to preside the meeting but could only attend the meeting later.¹⁶⁵ On appeal in High Court, it passed the verdict in favour of Avarnas, directed to lift the prohibition imposed on the entry of Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas and Kuravas.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ *Desabhimani*, 17 September 1925.

¹⁶⁴ *Deshabhimani*, 6 December 1925.

¹⁶⁵ 'Abrahmana Mahayogam' (Grand meeting of Non-Brahmins), *Deshabhimani*, 23 January 1926.

¹⁶⁶ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp. 324-25.

Thiruvarpu Riots: August – September 1927

The agitation for *Sanchara Swatantryam* in the temple roads of Tiruvarpu earned wide scale attention after Vaikom Satyagraha. The role of T.K. Madhavan here was radically different from that of previous agitations. The major reason for this change was his own skepticism on the question of efficacy of the non-violent mode of satyagraha struggle. The change in his line of thought was facilitated by his active participation in the organisational activities of SNDP Yogam. Moreover he was relieved from the activities of Indian National Congress to a large extent during this time. This does not mean that Madhavan had changed his allegiance towards national movement and to its supremo, Gandhiji. At the same time T.K. Madhavan had been continuously trying to convince Gandhiji the need for a different form of struggle to be adopted to redress the grievances of the Avarnas.

By early 1927 T.K. Madhavan was appointed as the Organising Secretary of SNDP Yogam and as such he was completely engaged in building up the SNDP organisation throughout Travancore.¹⁶⁷ Here in Tiruvarpu, Madhavan faced a big challenge from the Ezhavas, as they categorically conveyed that they would enmasse convert into Christianity if their grievances were not resolved. They also took a stand that they would not co-operate with the organizational activities led by T.K. Madhavan till their demands were met with.¹⁶⁸

The question of conversion of Ezhavas once again proved as a crucial factor which could change the prevailing equations. Though T.K. Madhavan

¹⁶⁷ P.S.Velayudhan, 1978. *SNDP Yoga Charitram* (History of SNDP Yogam) Quilon, SNDP Yogam, p.32.

Note: T.K. Madhavan was appointed as the Organizing Secretary of SNDP Yogam in pursuance of the resolution, No.12 adopted by the special session of S.N.D.P Yogam held at Alappuzha on 1-2 January 1927 (17-18 Dhanu 1102 M.E).

¹⁶⁸ P.K.Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.333-34.

tackled similar situations earlier, it proved to be a hard nut to crack in Tiruvarpu. It was a direct and personal challenge to T.K. Madhavan as he was convinced that he could not go ahead with the activities of Yogam till the demands of Ezhavas were met with. This forced him to initiate urgent steps.

Thiruvarpu temple was situated three miles west of Kottayam town, in the low lying area. The public road towards Kottayam town lies in the northern side of the temple. Avarnas were denied entry to this road; they had to walk more than the double distance to reach the approach road towards Kottayam. One was situated slightly north of the temple but here the way passed through paddy field and the other was a water way, the river ran around the southern side of the temple. But during monsoon season it was dangerous to venture into these paths. Occasional flooding was experienced here as the area was low lying. To the Pulayas even the water way was denied. Non-caste Hindus also had a harrowing time in these areas. There were two schools on either side of the temple and the majority of the students belonged to Avarnas. Avarna students reached schools with much difficulty. Risk of life was also involved since the wooden boats ferrying the little kids used to capsize many times during the monsoon season. Christians and Mohammedans were allowed in these temple roads.¹⁶⁹

In Kottayam town Ezhavas were well organized. By the turn of the 20th century there were organizations like *Achandra Thara Prasohibini Samajam*, (Details are given in the previous chapters) mobilized the community and had made assertions. As early as in October 1924 Madhavan visited Thiruvarpu, where the Ezhavas were agitating for accessibility in the temple roads. He spent some days there canvassing for the Ezhava cause, but nothing materialised at that time. Again in October 1926 T.K. Madhavan along with Sathyavrathan

¹⁶⁹ S. Madhavan, 'Thiruvapu Kshetra Roadukal' (Thiruvapu Temple Roads), *Deshabhimani*, 6 August 1927.

organized Ezhavas, took some of them along with the Pulayas in a boat and travelled through the river.

T.K. Madhavan relentlessly campaigned for the Avarna cause of *Sanchara Swatantryam* in Tiruvarpu temple roads. He visited Tiruvarpu while Vaikom Satyagraha was going on. During the month of December 1924 he came to Tiruvarpu and campaigned for sometime. He held discussions with authorities and a compromise formula was arrived but it was not implemented. Devaswom Commissioner agreed to construct a new road for the movement of Avarnas. Again after Kannankulangara agitation T.K. Madhavan visited Tiruvarpu during October 1926 and reminded the Devaswam Commissioner about his earlier promise. He could not keep the promise as the opposition from Savarnas was very strong. Devaswam Commissioner, Krishna Pillai was appointed as the acting Dewan of Travancore.

The attitude of the Savarnas remained unchanged as they enjoyed patronage from the state 'The hegemonic culture sets the limits to the imagination of upwardly mobile lower caste groups'. Here in Travancore on the contrary the oppressed castes had boldly undertaken efforts of 'subverting the ritual order or repudiating its moral behavior code'.¹⁷⁰

The discontent among the Ezhavas and other non-caste Hindus ran high in Thiruvarpu as the promises and assurances were not met with. In his capacity as Organizing Secretary of SNDP Yogam to conduct the organisation work T.K. Madhavan visited Thiruvarpu in July 1927. He faced highly agitated Ezhavas there who were on the verge of embracing Christianity. T.K. Madhavan was left with no other alternative but to launch a direct agitation for achieving *Sanchara Swatantryam* in the temple roads. Madhavan's biographer observes, as he was

¹⁷⁰ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.*, p.121.

totally against conversion for the sake of freedom, he decided to start the agitation in Thiruvarpu.¹⁷¹

Completely dissatisfied with ongoing discussions and parleys, some Ezhavas of Thiruvarpu publicly declared that they were to convert into Christianity and they met Fr. Panjikkaran who had already tried in the same line at Shertalai. As in Vaikom here also some Ezhavas who converted to Christianity, publicly walked through the temple roads. Alarmed by these developments Arya Samajists quickly intervened here also to 'save Avarnas' from the 'onslaughts of Christianity'. Arya Samaj missionary Veda Bandhu met T.K. Madhavan and held discussion with him on the temple road issue.¹⁷²

T.K. Madhavan informed the authorities that they would enter the prohibited roads on 13 August 1927. As elsewhere, discussions were held between the agitationists and authorities on 12 August 1927. A truce was reached in this discussion by which the road running north eastern part of temple (except two furlongs) would be closed with a wall and the area out of the wall would be open to all and a new road be constructed. But by this arrangement the portion closed would now become inaccessible to non-Hindus who enjoyed the right till then. 'Madhavan though skeptical, agreed it as a temporary arrangement'.¹⁷³ This arrangement caused heavy uproar among the Christians and other non-Hindus. Fearing the backlash from non-Hindus the promised wall construction was not implemented.

T.K. Madhavan along with some Ezhavas and a photographer visited the place on 5 September 1927 and took some photographs of the disputed pathways. Again on the next day he along with a group of more than twenty Ezhavas and other upper caste local leaders including C. Kuttan Nair, C.K.

¹⁷¹ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.334.

¹⁷² S. Madhavan, *op.cit.*

¹⁷³ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.335-36.

Kunjikrishnan Nair and V.R. Nanu reached the entry point of temple road in the northern side to take photographs of the compound wall of temple on that side. They were obstructed by a police constable; Madhavan persuaded the constable and tried to convince him about their intention. He further clarified that he was not there to cause any violence and instructed the group not to proceed further. No amount of appeal changed the decision of the constable, but Madhavan after leaving his walking stick (the top was laced with the picture of Gandhiji) and Khadar shawl there proceeded with C. Kuttan Nair, V.R. Nanu and C.K. Kunjikrishnan. When they reached near the Siva temple belonging to *Swamiyar Matom* of Namboothiris they were roughed up grievously by Nairs and Brahmins. Kuttan Nair suffered severe head injury and bled profusely (photographs given in Appendix VI) T.K. Madhavan was saved as he was protected by C.K. Kunju Krishnan who also suffered injuries, V.R. Nanu was spared. The groups accompanying Madhavan along with others who assembled immediately after knowing the incident indulged in retaliation. A terrible riot followed, T.K. Madhavan and others had a tough time in controlling the violent mob. An eye witness account attests the above developments.¹⁷⁴ Thousands of Ezhavas gathered at Thiruvarpur in the evening and the mood of the mob was explosive. They were dispersed peacefully after much persuasion.

Thiruvarpur incidents inflicted serious health hazards to Madhavan, who was already reeling under heavy asthmatic problem. He was indisposed for some time since the mid of September 1927. Thiruvarpur riot had huge impacts; it further strengthened the Ezhava mobilization. The Vaikom Satyagraha though lasted for nearly twenty months had not brought such a mobilization among the Ezhavas. After the riot in Thiruvarpur the process of Ezhava community mobilization further strengthened and there found a new sense of unity among the Ezhavas. It again proved that violent riots brought positive changes.

¹⁷⁴ N. Thankappan, 'Thiruvapu Sathyagraham' *Vivekodayam*, (T.K. Madhavan Birth Centenary Issue), August- October 1985, Book No. 19, Issue No. 8- 10, pp.51-53.

T.K. Madhavan deputed C. Kuttan Nair to apprise Gandhiji of the incidents. Madhavan felt that Gandhiji had also realised the gravity of the situation and this was expressed by Madhavan in one of his letters to Muloor S. Padmanabha Panickar. The letter shows the change in his line of thought towards the mode of struggle. The letter reads:

You might have heard about the uproar in Thiruvarpur. Mr. Kuttan Nair had met Mahatma Gandhi at Tamilnadu just three days back. His advice was not for Satyagraha but to enter the prohibited area in accordance with the Civil Disobedience policy. And it has been duly been intimated to the government. The policy is to march forward defying the police line if they try to halt us, or to get through a breach in the line. We can jump over the walls too.¹⁷⁵ (Copy of the letter in original, see in appendix VII).

During this time T.K. Madhavan was camping at Changanesseri for the organisational work in his capacity as the Organising Secretary of the SNDP Yogam. In another letter dated 4 October 1927 T.K. Madhavan wrote (addressee is not mentioned) that he received the telegram from Kuttan Nair, who was sent to Gandhiji to appraise the Thiruvarpur incident and also to invite him to Travancore, and hoped that Gandhiji would come to Thiruvarpur. Madhavan said that Mahatma Gandhi wanted civil disobedience instead of Satyagraha and this must be communicated to agitators in Thiruvarpur. The letter also said that Mahatma Gandhi would arrive at Thiruvarpur on 12 October 1927.¹⁷⁶ (Given in appendix VIII)

Gandhiji had not turned up in Thiruvarpur but came to Alleppey where he was received by T.K. Madhavan. An Ezhava deputation met Gandhiji at the behest of Madhavan. Government authorities had obtained the information that Gandhiji, in all probability would not visit Thiruvarpur. This was communicated

¹⁷⁵ T.K. Madhavan, Letter dated 6 October 1927 (20 kanni 1103 M.E) to Muloor.S. Padmanabha Panickar, Researcher's Private Collection (RPC).

¹⁷⁶ T.K. Madhavan, Letter dated 3 October 1927 (17 Kanni 1103 M.E), RPC.

by B. Narayana Pillai, District Superintendent of Police to the Chief Secretary to Government.¹⁷⁷

Braving his ill health, which further deteriorated during this time, T.K. Madhavan actively engaged himself in the agitations related to Thiruvarpur temple roads and in building organisation in Kuttanad area. Anticipating Gandhiji would visit Thiruvarpur on 12 October 1927 T.K. Madhavan intensified his campaign. In a letter on 8 October 1927 addressed to the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Kottayam, T.K. Madhavan wrote 'I will give you prior information when, in response to Mahatma Gandhi's advice, we start civil disobedience in the temple roads within the prohibition walls at Thiruvarpur and lead non-caste Hindus into those roads'.¹⁷⁸

T.K. Madhavan also organised an anti-untouchability society with K.S. Velayudhyan as its secretary in Thiruvarpur. To effectively co-ordinate the agitation, T.K. Madhavan shifted his camp from Changanassery to Thiruvarpur. The anti untouchability society organised a meeting near the temple premises. The authorities were taken aback by this sudden development and had taken all precautions to avert any untoward incident from happening.

(See the copy of the notice circulated in manuscript form in Appendix IX)

According to the police report the meeting started at 5 pm presided over by T. K. Madhavan. About 150 people attended the meeting. Swamy Atma Ram who sang the prayer spoke at length against caste system. K.S. Velayudhan read out the message of Kuttan Nair and T.K. Madhavan. P.K. Kochu Kunju and K.R. Narayanan also spoke supporting the views of Swamy Atma Ram. Narayanan concluded his speech with the hope that Avarnas would get into the temple within two years.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Confidential Section File No.846/1927, Bundle No.17, KSA, Trivandrum.

¹⁷⁸ Confidential Section File No.846/1927, KSA, Trivandrum.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

The official records testify T.K. Madhavan's great efforts in organising the movement in Tiruvarpu. A lot of communication took place between T.K. Madhavan and the authorities. Shortly afterwards the government withdrew the cases against the volunteers who violated the prohibitory orders against Avarnas in Thiruvarpu temple roads. On the advice of Gandhiji, T.K. Madhavan and others withdrew their complaints against the Savarnas who attacked them.

Thiruvarpu agitation is considered as one of the glorious moments in the history of Ezhava upsurge in Travancore. The violence unleashed by Savarnas made the Ezhavas more determined and helped them in rededicating themselves to the cause of all the oppressed.

T.K. Madhavan's presence enormously helped his community in this agitation. Though he was regularly in touch with Gandhiji in this agitation he was rather free from the control of the political leadership. This enabled him to initiate independent moves which qualitatively changed the situation. The communications between T.K. Madhavan and authorities reveal the fact that he could move without any interference from the Congress leadership that led finally to the victory of the Avarnas.

Suchindram

Suchindram was a place under Padmanabhapuram Division in the southern most part of Travancore. The region including Suchindram was called Nanjinad. This part of South Travancore had a luminous track record of Avarna assertions. The Shanars' agitation in the first half of the 19th century was the telling example of Avarna upsurge, which redefined the social structure of the regions in which the upper castes enjoyed unfettered control. Here violence played a major role in settling the issues. The Shanar agitation had considerably influenced the process of making and remaking of the communities. According to the settlement records the temple precincts were intended only for the

Savarnas and the temple tank was for their exclusive use. In the chariot road round the temple repair works were carried out only by Savarna workers.¹⁸⁰

Hindu traditions were strictly followed in Suchindram temple and there were strong restrictions codified pertaining to the extent of entry of each and every caste including Savarnas. Explaining the typical Brahminical influence in South India, Friedhelm Hardy observed one such feature and that was the construction of temples dedicated to Siva and Vishnu and the introduction of a type of puja that was codified in Sanskrit treatise.¹⁸¹ The temples consecrated to the Brahmanical deities, especially to Siva and their precincts, were considered as Sanketam grounds and reserved exclusively for the caste Hindus.¹⁸²

In Suchindram the caste rules were scrupulously followed. Even missionaries and Europeans were attacked by caste Hindus as they entered in the 'prohibited' roads, unaware of the restrictions in force.¹⁸³ In the 12th session of SMPA, Kumaran Asan drew the attention of the government to the sufferings of Avarnas in the temple roads of Suchindram and demanded the removal of prohibition boards.¹⁸⁴ There were instances in which caste Hindus persuaded lower castes to cross the pollution limits, only to initiate criminal action against them. Unaware of the mischief and conspiracy behind it, many avarnas were trapped.¹⁸⁵ In Suchindram there prevailed a curious and savage custom in which an alleged culprit had to dip her/his hands in boiled oil to prove innocence. This was called *Suchindram Kaimukku*. This practice was banned in 1844 and the government of India abolished it in 1861 by legislation.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Thulasibhai, *op.cit.*, No. 143, pp. 139-40.

¹⁸¹ Friedhelm Hardy, 'A Radical Reassessment of the Vedic Heritage' in Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich Von Steitencron (ed.), *The Oxford India: Hinduism Reader*, 2007. New Delhi, OUP, p.32.

¹⁸² B. Sobhanan, 'Temple Entry Movement in Kerala' *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol.XII, 1985 Parts 1-4. Kariyavattom, Department of History, University of Kerala, p. 195

¹⁸³ *Travancore Legislative Council Proceedings*, 1924, Vol. VI, p.68.

¹⁸⁴ *Proceedings of SMPA*, 12th session, 1916, p.120.

¹⁸⁵ *Cover File No.1627/1892*, KSA, Trivandrum.

¹⁸⁶ P. Bhaskaranunni, 1988, Rpt. (2000). *Pathonpathom Nootandile Keralam* (Kerala in the 19th Century), Thrissur, Kerala Sahithya Academy, p.746.

The Satyagraha at Suchindram

Even after the conclusion of Vaikom Satyagraha and the consequent agreement there upon the roads round the caste-Hindu temples remained inaccessible to Avarnas and Suchindram was no exception. In Suchindram the agitation for *Sanchara Swatantryam* was chiefly coordinated by Dr. Emperumal Naidu, who already became very popular through his participation in Vaikom Satyagraha. He informed the authorities about the satyagraha to be started on 18 January 1926. The Devasowm Commissioner in turn communicated the matter to Dewan M.E. Watts. He also sent a detailed report of satyagraha which took place on that day. The volunteers' march towards the prohibited road was opposed by Brahmins and other Savarnas. When they were obstructed they did not attempt to force their way but sat down quietly on the ground in front of Savarnas. The Satyagrahis led by E.M. Naidu finally dispersed by evening. There was a strong posse of police and sightseers assembled there.¹⁸⁷

The campaign continued and they formed a satyagraha committee. Emperumal Naidu, Subramoniya Pillai and Shvathanu Pillai were among the members of the committee. Satyagraha was performed again on 29 January 1926 after giving prior notice to authorities. As in the previous occasion the satyagrahis faced the wrath and hostility of anti-sathyagrahis. Desabhimani covered the report of satyagraha on 29 January 1926. The paper extended its solidarity to agitation and condemned the actions of counter satyagrahis. It described the counter satyagrahis as lumpen elements.¹⁸⁸ E. V. Rama Swamy Naickar paid a visit to Suchindram and addressed a gathering. He criticised the Brahmanas, Vellalas and other counter satyagrahis, for their opposition to any

¹⁸⁷ Confidential Section File, No.821/1921, Bundle No.5, KSA, Trivandrum.

¹⁸⁸ Deshabhimani, 30 January 1926.

social change. It was announced that satyagraha would continue in the following days at the eastern side of the temple.¹⁸⁹

The satyagraha on 30 January 1926 witnessed bitter violent incidents as the counter satyagrahis unleashed a spate of violence. The authorities on the other hand urged the satyagrahis to observe peace and patience. The commissioner of police W. H. Pitts reminded E. M. Naidu about the rules framed by Gandhiji for the conduct of satyagraha.¹⁹⁰ The state had indeed found solace in Gandhian method as it proved to be the most effective tool to combat its own crisis.

The news of the incident at Suchindram on 29 January 1926 instigated further violent incidents around the area. The situation remained grim as police either connived with Savarnas or initiated no action against trouble makers. Savarnas attacked innocent persons simply because they belonged to Avarna communities. M. Shiva Thanu Pillai, member of Travancore Legislative Council was an eye witness to one such attack. He said, 'In the presence of a head constable and three constables, more than thirteen passers joined together and assaulted some youngsters belonging to the depressed class as they were returning after the celebration in the Mission college at Nagarcoil. These poor young innocent children were brutally assaulted by a number of persons who had got themselves drunk previously. I was myself an eye witness to this incident. All my remonstrance to these offenders was absolutely of no avail'.¹⁹¹

When the Suchindram Satyagraha started T.K. Madhavan was away in North India to attend the Kanpur session of INC to be held in the last week of December 1925. He utilized this opportunity to chalk out a programme for temple entry of Avarnas, in consultation with the all India leadership. On his arrival in Travancore, during the middle of February 1926, T.K. Madhavan met

¹⁸⁹ *Confidential Section File, No.821/1921, Bundle No.5, KSA, Trivandrum.*

¹⁹⁰ *Thulasibhai, op.cit., No.14, p.154.*

¹⁹¹ *Travancore Legislative Council Proceedings, 1926, Vol. IX, pp. 681-82.*

Changanassery Prameswara Pillai. Along with Parameswara Pillai, Madhavan met the police commissioner, W.H. Pitt and initiated moves to end the satyagraha in Suchindram.

T. K. Madhavan visited Suchindram on 16 February 1926 and there also he continued parleys with E.M. Naidu to end the satyagraha. T.K. Madhavan was well aware of the situation in Suchindram, where the resistance of Avarnas continued. Unlike in many other satyagrahas here in Suchindram the violent clashes between Savarnas and satyagrahis continued unabated. T.K. Madhavan again met W.H. Pitt to end the satyagraha as it was chalked out in Vaikom.

In Suchindram a committee was formed including T. K. Madhavan, M. Siva Thanu Pillai, M. Subramanyiam Pillai and Dr. E.M. Naidu. The discussion continued between Changanassery and Pitt and the latter agreed to meet some of the demands of the satyagrahis.¹⁹² The satyagraha was stopped as a result of the agreement arrived between Changanassery Parameswaran Pillai and W.H. Pitt. T.K. Madhavan earnestly tried for it. The details of the discussion was available from the letter from Changanassery to E.M. Naidu, wrote on 25 February 1927. It says 'I met Mr. Pitt yesterday afternoon. He was very anxious about the developments in Suchindram. He agreed to demolish the barricades and stages erected by anti-satyagrahis (Savarnas). You must stop the satyagraha as and when the demolition is completed. He has also agreed that he will obtain orders from the government for the smooth movement of Avarnas in the prohibited roads and will take all steps to protect Avarnas from the violence of caste Hindus'.¹⁹³

The assurance of Pitt remained unimplemented as he left the Travancore service. The temple road in Suchindram also remained same as it was. The satyagraha resumed again on 12 May 1930. T.K. Madhavan's role in this Satyagraha was limited; whatever he did was done to end the Satyagraha. He

¹⁹² P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.329-330

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.330-31

came to know about Suchindram Satyagraha while he was in North India. He promptly reported about it to Gandhiji, who in turn evinced keen interest in it and asked Madhavan to sort out the issue. As soon as he reached Travancore he acted according to Gandhiji's wishes.

The caste equation in this part was quite different from that existed in the rest of Travancore. Both Avarnas and Savarnas were equally determined to protect their interests and were prepared to go to any extent to achieve it. Unlike the rest of Travancore, this region was comparatively less intervened by the forces of nationalism, at least till the time of satyagraha. This might have helped all communities to preserve the traits of their past. The cultural milieu of the region was different because of the strong presence of missionary activities and consequent mobility of the oppressed castes witnessed in this region right from the turn of 19th century.

The struggle for *Sanchara Swatantryam* fought between 1924-27 involved complex phenomena of Ezhava community formation. This struggle very often overlapped with the question of temple entry, but it was not originally conceived for it. This overlapping and complex nature involved in the struggle for *Sanchara Swatantryam* posed a challenge to most writers as they failed to distinguish the struggle between temple entry and *Sanchara Swatantryam*. The overarching influence of religion and its concerns primarily drove T.K. Madhavan to negotiate and place the cause of community before the forces of nationalism, resulted in a significant departure from the path which the Ezhava community had been following. P.K. Balakrishnan observed that the young Madhavan was bold enough to call a spade a spade; he approached untouchability as it was. He expressed his strong righteous indignation towards it more than any others, but at the same time he could not find it as the most organic part of a social order.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ P.K. Balakrishnan, 1954.Rpt. (2000). 'T.K. Madhavan' in P.K. Balakrishnan (Compiled and Edited) *Narayana Guru* (Mal.), Thrissur, Kerala Sahithya Akademy, pp.232-237.

Organizing the Community: Growth of SNDP Yogam and the Cultural Imageries of Nation

The dominant discourse on nationalism generally considers 'community' as a discrediting category to the factors thought to be favorable to imagine nation. The phenomenal growth of SNDP Yogam as the organisation representing the aspirations of the Ezhava community thus overtly runs against the interests of nation and its making. The nationalist ethos and the cultural imageries, invented or rediscovered by nationalism and used by T.K. Madhavan were favourable to the growth of SNDP Yogam and this makes the study curious and complex.

It was T.K. Madhavan, the arch nationalist, loyal Congress man and the true follower of Gandhiji, who led the movement of organizing the Ezhava community and made SNDP Yogam the single largest community organization. The service to SNDP Yogam alone would be enough to place him in an esteemed position in the history of Ezhava community'.¹ As far as the SNDP Yogam is concerned the way in which T.K. Madhavan built the organization in Travancore in his capacity as the Organizing Secretary was an amazing achievement unparalleled in its history.

T.K. Madhavan as Organizing Secretary of SNDP Yogam had made significant contributions in uniting the labour force in Alapuzha.² Alapuzha the upturned soil of labour and peasant movement had considerably influenced the growth and spread of Communist movement in Kerala. Babu Vijayanath, T.K. Madhavan's son believes that the Communists in Kerala were in fact copying

¹ P.K. Madhavan, 1936. *T.K.Madhavante Jeeva Charitram* (T.K.Madhavan's Biography), Vol.2, Trivandrum, M/s Sarada Book Depot., p.480.

² M.K. Kumaran, 'SNDP Yogavum Keralthile Purogamana Prasthanavum' (SNDP Yogam and the Progressive Movement in Kerala), in G. Priyadarsanan (ed.), *SNDP Yogam Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, (Hereafter called SNDP Yogam PJS) 1978, Quilon, SNDP Yogam, pp.45-46.

the method and strategy of T.K to organize and build a movement.³ The social content of the labour movement in Kerala and the trade union movement in Britain had some commonalities, says Louise Owerkerk. According to her the activities of SNDP Yogam in Travancore and the Methodist Church in England were important in getting the labourers organized. Travancore Labour Association was formed by SNDP Yogam in 1922. By 1926 it had 800 members and all of them were not Ezhavas. It ran a night school, reading room and an employment bureau. On 26 May 1926 All Travancore Labour Conference was held in Quilon which was presided over by T.K. Madhavan.⁴

The organizational work done by T.K. Madhavan itself achieved the dimension of a social movement. He tried to change SNDP Yogam as a strong model of community's collective mobilization and will. M.S.A. Rao speaks of two basic features that define a social movement: the collective mobilization and change in orientation based on an ideology.⁵ K.Ayyappan, the all time great rebel within the SNDP Yogam was a critic of Madhavan on many issues but he also conceded that Madhavan was instrumental in transforming the SNDP Yogam into a popular mass organisation.⁶

The last leg of the public activities of T.K. Madhavan was almost devoted to building the organization. It involved many complexities as Madhavan's engagement with nationalism continued. This naturally cast its influence over the process of community mobilization. The traits of Hinduization and nationalization became visible and strong and had far reaching impacts.

³ Babu Vijayanath, Interview with the Author at his Residence, on 25 September 2004.

⁴ Louise Owerkerk, 1994. *No Elephants for the Maharajah: Social and Political Change in the Princely State of Travancore (1921-1947)*, Delhi, Manohar, pp.63-64.

⁵ M.S.A.Rao, 'Conceptual Problems in the Study of Social Movements', in M.S.A. Rao (ed.), 1984, Rpt. (2000). *Social Movements in India*, New Delhi, Manohar, P.2.

⁶ *Vivekodayam*, March – April 1968, Book No.2, Issue No.3 & 4, pp.142-43.

T.K. Madhavan was the leader mainly responsible for making the SNDP Yogam a grand organization in terms of membership. He could also re-orient the community's consciousness into a new direction. Whether this directional change inaugurated a turning point in the history of modern Kerala should be seriously looked into. The question assumes relevance considering the fact that the Ezhavas as a community had become the single largest base of the Communist movement in Kerala. Communist Party made deep inroads in the agricultural and industrial sectors from 1930's in Kerala thanks to the ground work done by Sree Narayana Movement.

By the end of 1920's the Ezhavas under the charismatic leadership of T.K. Madhavan, became the part and parcel of a well disciplined and highly efficient organizational frame work. Whether the community consciousness of Ezhavas transcended into organizational consciousness must be examined in detail. This assumes further significance in the context that the strategies and methods employed by Madhavan as the Organizing Secretary had sidetracked the specific Ezhava identity and community consciousness. It is to be further examined whether this trajectory had facilitated the Communist Party to make inroads in the Ezhava community.

The historic decision of SNDP Yogam to appoint T.K. Madhavan as its Organizing Secretary was influenced by many factors. Yogam had learnt some striking lessons from the Vaikom Satyagraha. The oft proclaimed aim of eradication of untouchability of the satyagraha was not met and the Ezhava community's condition remained as it existed before. On the other hand KPCC got significant mileage by the satyagraha. By extending support to satyagraha the SNDP Yogam was in a way integrating the Ezhavas into the national stream which Madhavan had been single handedly attempting well before the commencement of the satyagraha. Ezhava participation in satyagraha made them aware of the organizational intricacies, as the satyagraha was strictly controlled by KPCC's Anti Untouchability Committee. Some leaders of the

Ezhava community had forecast the dangers involved in this integration. The apprehension in this regard was strongly expressed by leaders like C. Krishnan and K. Ayyappan.

A leader like C. Krishnan had already declared that 'not even ten Vaikom Satyagrahas would resolve the grievances of Ezhavas'. He argued that the Ezhavas should organize themselves in an independent manner and should keep and project their identity. He was not against unity between the Nairs and the Ezhavas but believed that it should not be at the cost of Ezhava identity. He pooh-poohed the idealist notion of 'no caste and no religion' and also mocked at the philosophy behind the phrase that 'all human beings are one and equal'. He went deep into these questions and pinpointed the inbuilt dangers in such arguments.⁷ The entire process of community mobilization undertaken by T.K. Madhavan was contrary to the notions of C. Krishnan. T.K. Madhavan envisaged SNDP Yogam as a strong organization to represent the entire Ezhavas of Kerala and he thought it would become an instrument totally at his command.

Many in the Ezhava leadership thought that the community's alliance with the national movement did not bring anything positive to them and that the estrangement of Ezhavas due to the alliance had strongly affected the community's psyche. This feeling gained currency and this also prompted SNDP Yogam to pay more attention in building the organization.

⁷ C.Krishnan, 'Samudaya Vazhakkukal' (Community Clashes), *Sahodaran*, Annual Issue, 1928, pp. 45-47.

SNDP Yogam: The Change in Guard and T.K. Madhavan's Consolidation

N. Kumaran Asan, founder Secretary of the SNDP Yogam continued in that position till the 16th session of the organization held at Kayamkulam in May 1919. He was unwilling to continue and after a long discussion N. Kumaran was elected to the post.⁸ T.K. Madhavan played a crucial role in this meeting.⁹

This session was held at Kayamkulam mainly to ensure the presence of Yogam and community leaders to sort out the family feud of Alumoottil Channars. This was the first time a venue for the annual session was selected with a particular aim.¹⁰ But the efforts of mediators including C. Krishnan, who presided over the session, did not prove to be successful. Consequent to the selection of N. Kumaran as the General Secretary, the head- quarters of SNDP Yogam was shifted from Thiruvananthapuram to Quilon, a stronghold of T.K. Madhavan. N.Kumaran continued in this post till the 25th session of SNDP Yogam (May 1928 – Neyyattinkara) and the mantle was handed over to C.V. Kunjuraman. The period of N. Kumaran was generally known as 'period of T.K. Madhavan'.¹¹ The same view was shared by many Ezhava leaders and writers. T.K. Madhavan's efforts of Hinduization of Ezhava community were reflected in many annual sessions of SNDP Yogam, organized by him particularly in the period after N. Kumaran assumed the office of General Secretary.¹²

T.K. Madhavan played an important role in bringing out the change of leadership in SNDP Yogam. Organizational weakness was projected as the

⁸ *Mitavadi*, June 1919, Book No.4, Issue No.6, pp. 281-93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.278-79.

¹⁰ Editorial, 'SNDP Yogam', *Desabhimani*, 17 May 1919.

¹¹ N.K. Damodaran, 'N. Kumaran BA. BL', *SNDP Yogam PJS*, 1978, p.468.

¹² K. Karthikeyan, 'C. Kesavan', *SNDP Yogam Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (Hereafter called SNDP Yogam GJS), 1953, Quilon, SNDP Yogam, pp.189-192.

reason for this, but the differences of opinion between Kumaran Asan and T.K. Madhavan also played an important role in this regard. Madhavan by virtue of his family background always enjoyed the goodwill and confidence of Narayana Guru.

Even after N. Kumaran assumed charge, SNDP Yogam did not percolate down to the Ezhava masses as envisaged in the plans of new leadership. It failed to assume the status of a representative body of the Ezhava masses. Some of the organizational regulations deterred the Ezhava masses to become members of SNDP Yogam. Only 1841 Ezhavas were members of SNDP Yogam in 1921 and the membership went up to only 4200 even in 1926 at a time when the total Ezhava population was nearly 7 lakhs in Travancore alone.¹³ This sorry state of affairs of SNDP Yogam was pointed out by many to highlight the phenomenal achievement of T.K. Madhavan as Organizing Secretary. 'Commitment is manifest in the adoption of the belief system, willingness to volunteer in performing various tasks, readiness to take risks of different kinds'.¹⁴ As the Organizing Secretary of SNDP Yogam, T.K. Madhavan dared to take risks and uphill tasks.

Since the takeover of N. Kumaran as the General Secretary of SNDP Yogam T.K. Madhavan began to enjoy a definite say in the organizational matters of SNDP Yogam. He was active in organizing many annual sessions of SNDP Yogam and formulating its strategies and programmes. Madhavan who led many struggles became almost an icon.

Membership fee of the SNDP Yogam was very high and this virtually closed its doors to ordinary Ezhavas. SNDP Yogam also did not undertake practical programmes addressing the specific problems encountered by Ezhavas

¹³ P.K.Gopalakrishnan, 'T.K. Madhavanum Rashtriya Prasthanavum' (T.K. Madhavan and Political Movements), *Yoganadam Weekly*, T.K.Madhavan Birth Centenary Issue, (Hereafter called Yoganadam) 1985, Quilon, SNDP Yogam, p.59.

¹⁴ M.S.A. Rao, *op.cit.*, p.9.

in different regions. Local specificities were reasons of marginalization of the community in particular areas. Here also Yogam failed to see issues in local perspectives. But T.K. Madhavan was determined to address these issues. He made conscious efforts to throw open the doors of SNDP Yogam to ordinary Ezhavas. Similarly he took part and led several agitations demanding the redressal of specific grievances existed in different localities. These strategies helped in achieving a great leap for the SNDP Yogam.

As an efficient organizer Madhavan's maneuvering capabilities saved SNDP Yogam from dangers many times and were also helped to keep the Ezhavas within the Hindu fold. Madhavan was willing to go to any extent to keep the Ezhavas within Hinduism. He led many agitations with that objective. In Tiruvarpu, Madhavan realized that he could not move any further with his organizational work because of the hostile attitudes of Ezhavas. Here Ezhavas publicly declared that they would not co-operate with Madhavan unless their grievances were addressed. Ezhavas in this area were severely oppressed and had been denied all sorts of social freedom. They decided to convert to Christianity to escape caste oppression. T.K. Madhavan decided to settle the issue of Ezhavas first and deferred the organizational work as he was primarily concerned with stopping conversion. He actively involved himself in Tiruvarpu agitation (details have been discussed in the previous chapter) to get the problems of Ezhavas resolved. Very interestingly in Tiruvarpu agitation violence played a crucial role in settling the issue unlike in many other agitations. In Tiruvarpu, Madhavan achieved twin aims. He was able to build a strong organization in this area and could abort the move of conversion.

K. Ayyappan in his presidential address in the 34th annual session of SNDP Yogam (10-11 May 1937) profusely praised T.K. Madhavan. He said 'the permanent institutional foundation of SNDP Yogam had been laid by T.K. Madhavan'. K. Ayyappan the known critic of Madhavan had to accept the contribution of the latter to SNDP Yogam and publicly hailed him. Ayyappan

also called the period of N. Kumaran as the period of T.K. Madhavan and termed it as the 'period of agitation and organization building'. Further in his speech Ayyappan contextualized the caste assertions and he elaborated the difference of 'caste' and 'national interest'. He also observed that the nationalist agenda would keep the communities away from their aims. He also questioned the notion of 'incapability' of castes to represent themselves and demystified the theory of 'irrepresentability' of communities.¹⁵

Restructuring the Organisation

After the take over of N. Kumran, there were new initiatives to revamp the organization. The control mechanism of SNDP Yogam tilted in favour of T.K. Madhavan and he was offered a free hand in effecting changes. Major decisions taken at the 18th session of SNDP Yogam at Karunagapally show a clear shift in policy and the meeting sent a strong message to Kumaran Asan and his supporters. The lessons from the temple entry agitations were strong enough for the SNDP Yogam to concentrate heavily on building the organization.

The Karunagapally session decided to appoint two Assistant Secretaries to look after the organizational affairs of the North and South divisions of Travancore.¹⁶ T.K. Madhavan was given the charge of South division and K.Ayyappan the North.¹⁷ Karthikapally, Mavelikkara, Kunnathoor, Kottarakkara, Pathanapuram *taluks* and the *taluks* south to them were included in the South division which came under T.K. Madhavan. *Taluks* north to those areas were in Northern division controlled by K. Ayyappan.¹⁸

¹⁵ N.K. Damodaran, 1982 *SNDP Yogathile Adhyksha Prasangangal* (Presidential Adresses in SNDP Yogam), [compiled & edited], Trivandrum, pp.149-59.

¹⁶ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.483.

¹⁷ M.K. Narayanan, 'T.K. Madhavante Sanghatana Pravarthanam'(T.K. Madhavan's Organaisational Works), *Yoganadam*, 1985, pp.61-62.

¹⁸ P.S. Velayudhan, 1978 *SNDP Yoga Charitram*, (History of SNDP Yogam) Quilon, SNDP Yogam, pp.61-62.

Appointment of T.K. Madhavan as the Assistant Secretary was proved to be the turning point in the history of SNDP Yogam. As temple entry agitation was temporarily shelved, the next two years (October 1921 – December 1923) saw Madhavan actively engaged in building the organization.

The new task undertaken by T.K. Madhavan had also another dimension, i.e., it helped him to overcome the difficulties rose out of the temple entry agitation. Ezhava community encountered traumatic experiences during that period. At the instance of Madhavan the Karunagapally session decided to amend the clauses regarding the establishment of new branches. More liberal and practical clauses were invoked so as to make starting of new branches easy. Kerala Kaumudi hailed this decision and lauded T.K. Madhavan.¹⁹

T.K. Madhavan's ability to mobilize the masses was proven beyond doubt. One of the most powerful orators and organizers of the time, he was confident of leading the organization into new heights. Madhavan proposed a master plan for the growth of SNDP Yogam and in a meeting organized by the local leadership of the organization in Karunagapally he elaborated the plan. This was considered as an important document in the history of the SNDP Yogam.²⁰

T.K. Madhavan stressed the need to set up branches of SNDP Yogam at village level (*Karayogam*). Community's unity could be achieved only through this action. He emphasized the importance of a strong organisation and added that community's aim and progress could not be achieved unless and until community members were united at the grassroots level. He compared the system to that of government's control over its population. He also emphasized the need for a hierarchical organisational set up to have an effective control of

¹⁹ Kerala Kaumudi, 19 May 1921.

²⁰ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.*, pp.226-27

SNDP Yogam over the members of the community. To establish this fact he explained the functioning of the bureaucratic set up of the government, i.e., from Dewan to village officers. He also inspired the members who attended the meeting by inviting their attention to the functioning of Christian religion. He concluded, 'so we have to re-organize our SNDP Yogam. Yogam should establish its zonal centres in Cochin and in British Malabar. Then branches are to be opened in each *Taluk* and also in each *Kara* of all *Taluks*. We must have a Head Office and three provisional headquarters apart from *Taluk* branches, *Proverty* branches and *Kara* branches.' He also visualised that by this arrangement the General Secretary of SNDP Yogam could be able to control the whole community from his head quarters, like the Dewan to Government or a Bishop of a Christian denomination.²¹

Having accepted the responsibility of Assistant Secretary, T.K. Madhavan concentrated first in Karunagappally *taluk* to organize the SNDP Yogam. With much effort two branches of SNDP Yogam were established, one in Padanayarkulangara and the other in Nambivirakala.²² Nilamperoor branch in Changanassery taluk had been registered as branch number one.²³ But the members of Anandashramam branch then made a claim to be registered as number one. T.K. Madhavan settled the dispute by giving number one to both branches with (a) and (b).²⁴ This incident was often cited as an example of the shrewd diplomacy of T.K. Madhavan in settling community disputes. Meanwhile many local Ezhava organizations requested Madhavan's service in their respective areas for their organizations including the Karuppuram Ezhava Youth Organisation. Their request was made publicly in a grand meeting of the organization held at Karappuram on 10-11 October 1921.²⁵

²¹ *Desabhimani*, 18 June 1921, also see P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.483-87.

²² P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.483.

²³ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.*, p.226.

²⁴ N.K. Kamalasanan, 1999. *Kuttanadum Karshaka Thozilali Prasthanavum* (Kuttanad and Peasant Labour Movement), Thiruvananthapuram, Dept. of Cultural Publications, Govt. of Kerala, pp.50-51.

²⁵ *Desabhimani*, 22 October 1921.

SNDP Yogam Sessions: Mega Events re-orient the Spirit of Identity

Madhavan's potentials came out in its full vigour in organizing SNDP sessions since 1921. Karunagappally (1921) Eramallore (1922) Muthukulam (1925) Pallathuruthu (1927) and finally at Kottayam (1929) sessions deserve special mention. T.K. Madhavan was the head of the reception committee of all these annual sessions and thus enjoyed absolute power in structuring the events. The sessions organized by Madhavan were successful mega events in terms of popular appeal and participation. The entire arrangement and the method of conducting the sessions were different from that of previous ones. The tone, tenor and the ambience of the sessions were different.

T.K. Madhavan appeared to be in full command in the session held in his home town Karunagappally in 1921. Unlike in previous sessions he was more defiant and unyielding there. In the Alleppey session (1920) Madhavan moved a resolution favouring conversion, though under compelling circumstances (only once in his life time T.K. Madhavan took such a stand). In Karunagappally we saw just the reversal gesture of T.K. Madhavan. In this session those who opposed conversion got a definite upper hand and they completely silenced the voice of those who favoured conversion. A resolution was even brought in this session to prohibit attempts of conversion by Ezhavas. Kerala Kaumudi reporting the session hailed the efforts of T.K. Madhavan for making the session a success and defeating the attempts of conversion.²⁶

A conscious process of nationalizing the community was evident in the programmes of all these sessions. The cultural events conducted along with these sessions reflected strong nationalist traits. The organizers envisaged that these would help in bringing the community under the spell of nationalism.

²⁶ Kerala Kaumudi, 12 May 1921.

The 19th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Eramallore, north of Shertala in Alleppey district on 10-12 May 1922 was the typical example of the efforts of the organizers to bring Ezhavas under the influence of nationalism. T.K. Madhavan was the chairman of the reception committee. The cultural events conducted in connection with these sessions were parts of the attempts to manufacture the consent of Ezhavas for a 'common tradition' of all Hindus. Hindu cultural practices got a firm say in Eramallore and this was superimposed over the session with a specific intention of 'inventing traditions.' The cultural cloak was always proved to be a soft and safe instrument to create the consciousness of the communities. This trend gathered momentum session after session since 1921 and continued up to 1929.

Romila Thapar, while elaborately discussing the search for Hindu identity endorsed Gramsci's notion of hegemony. According to her the class which wanted to establish hegemony had to nationalize itself and the new 'nationalist' Hinduism came from the middle class.²⁷ Reviving the cultural past of the dominant sections (caste-Hindus) by employing even unpleasant or difficult methods, was at the centre of invoking the rationale of the nation. Deeply analyzing the bond between the processes of construction of modern Indian nation and Hindu religion, Susan Bayly clearly locates the role played by the Hindu social reformers of various hues in making the nation a reality.²⁸

Eramallore session inaugurated a new turn in SNDP's policies, i.e., extending the organization's allegiance to Indian National Congress and its political ideology. This is a marked deviation from the tradition followed by SNDP Yogam. T.K. Madhavan masterminded this turn and he received total support from N. Kumaran, the General Secretary of SNDP Yogam in this

²⁷ Romila Thapar, 'Imagined Religious Communities' in David N. Lorenzen (ed.), 2004. *Religious Movements in South Asia 600-1800: Debates in Indian History and Society*, New Delhi, OUP, pp.334-57.

²⁸ Susan Bayly, 'Hindu Modernisers and the Public Arena Indigenous Critiques of Caste in Colonial India' in William Radice (ed.), 1998. *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, Delhi, OUP, pp.94-96.

regard.²⁹ However A.N.N. Panicker, who presided over the session, expressed a voice of dissent. He publicly expressed his displeasure in his presidential address for having conducted the meeting of KPCC in the same venue. He also criticized the policies of Indian National Congress.³⁰ The sessions held at Karunagappally, Eramallore, Muthukulam and Pallathuruthu showed pomp and lavishness.³¹

Eramallore session was held in three days and the whole expense of the meeting was met by a rich local Ezhava leader, Kureethara Nanu. Finding such persons capable and willing to spend any amount of money for the conduct of the sessions was T.K. Madhavan's achievement. Fifteen thousand people could be accommodated in the *Shamiana* put up at the venue. The cultural events followed every day after the business sessions and they were loaded with values of Hinduism and nationalism. Within the venue (*Sree Narayana Nagaram*) there were several stalls and entrances and they were given the names of community leaders as well as leaders of Indian National Congress.³²

T.K. Madhavan was re-elected as the Assistant Secretary in the Eramallore session. It was decided in this session to reduce the amount of membership fee to enroll in SNDP Yogam, from hundred rupees to five and a provision was given to pay it in installments. T.K. Madhavan was behind this decision. This paved the way for ordinary Ezhavas to become members of SNDP Yogam. This session also decided to send T.K. Madhavan to North Kerala to co-ordinate the relief measures undertaken by SNDP Yogam for the victims of Malabar rebellion.³³

²⁹ N.K. Damodaran, *op.cit.*, No. 11, p.469.

³⁰ *Desabhimani*, 13 May 1922.

³¹ N.K. Damodaran, *op.cit.* No. 11, p.472.

³² P.S. Velayudhan, 'T.K. Madhavan, Athulyanaya Sanghatakan' (T.K. Madhavan, Unique Organizer), *Vivekodayam: T.K. Madhavan Birth Centenary Issue*, 1985 (herein after called *Vivekodayam* 1985), pp .27-29 also see P.K.Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.423-26.

³³ M.K. Narayanan, 'SNDP Yogavum T.K. Madhavanum' (SNDP Yogam and T.K. Madhavan), *SNDP Yogam PJS*, 1978, p.151.

T.K. Madhavan's oratorical and organizational skills were much appreciated in this session. K. Ayyappan who participated in the Eramallore session was all praise for Madhavan, the public speaker. Ayyappan observed that T.K. Madhavan stood at the top among the men who made profound impacts in Kerala through their speeches.³⁴ It was in this session that Ayyappan and others burned the effigy of the caste monster.³⁵ Before the session Desabhimani and Kerala Kaumudi made passionate appeals to all Ezhavas to participate in the Eramallore session and make it a great success. This session generated great enthusiasm among the members of the community.³⁶

In the Alappuzha session (1920) the Yogam decided to give membership to non-Ezhavas and non-Hindus provided it would not affect the privileges of the existing members. N. Kumaran expressed dismay over the number of membership while presenting the annual report at the 18th session. He noted that only 1841 Ezhavas became members of SNDP Yogam so far as against the total population of Ezhavas in Kerala fetched nearly 18 lakhs.³⁷

N. Kumaran and T.K. Madhavan made efforts to broaden the base of SNDP Yogam by increasing its membership. But at the same time it is to be remembered that the quantum of Ezhava assertion and the identity formation of the community till that period was remarkable. The Ezhavas converted to other religions in a considerable way during this time as they did not find any meaning in remaining within the Hindu fold. The new leadership was very much concerned about this trend and they thought that strengthening the organisation would be a remedy to stop that.

³⁴ Karuvannoor Ramachandran, 'T.K. Madhavan', *Vivekodayam*, May 1968, Book No.2, Issue No.6, pp.5-10.

³⁵ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No.32, p.28.

³⁶ C. Kesavan, 1968, Rpt. (1999). *Jeevitha Samaram* (Life Struggle), Thiruvananthapuram, Prabhat Book House, p.309.

³⁷ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No.18, pp. 179-186.

Some writers believe that the decision to admit non- Ezhavas was taken in the special session of SNDP Yogam held at Perinad, Quilon on January 1922 (*Dhamu 1097*) but they also accept the role of T.K. Mdhavan behind this move.³⁸ Some others held that it was a bold step from SNDP Yogam as no other Hindu community organisation dared to adopt such a stand.³⁹

The 22nd session of SNDP Yogam was held at Muthukulam in Karthikappally on 7-9 May 1925. This session further proved the excellent capabilities of T.K. Madhavan as an organizer and manager of events. Muthukulam session was held during Vaikom sathyagraha, but the spirit of the sathyagraha had been considerably dwindled at that time. In between Eramallore and Muthukulam sessions there were great changes as far as Madhavan was concerned. By early 1924 he was enrolled as a Congress worker and very soon became a member of KPCC.

T.K. Madhavan tried to kindle the passion of Ezhavas in favour of INC since the beginning of 1924 and it became so fervent during the Vaikom sathyagraha. But as a seasoned community leader and an insightful organizer he always tried to win over the hearts of those who opposed his ideals. It was at Madhavan's instance that C. Krishnan presided over the Muthukulam session of SNDP Yogam who severely criticized Congress and its programme.⁴⁰

The Muthukulam session indicated that the cultural ethos of nationalist movement got total grip over SNDP Yogam. The venue of the session was named as Gandhi Nagar. A special makeshift structure erected within the venue was named as C.R. Das Mandiram. The different walkways within the venue were named after nationalist leaders. They were known as Mohammed Ali Street, Motilal Nehru Street, Madanmohan Malaviya Street, Shaukath Ali Street, Sarojini Naidu Street etc. Not even a single Ezhava community leader's

³⁸ M.K. Narayanan, *op.cit.* No.33, p.150. Also see P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.420.

³⁹ N.K. Damodaran, *op.cit.* No.11, p.472.

⁴⁰ *Desabhimani*, 23 May 1925.

name was given to any of them. Conferences of sister organisations were being held along with main SNDP Yogam session and in Muthukulam the conference of the Hindu Mahajana Sabha was also held.⁴¹

Muthukulam session made it clear that the cultural identity of Ezhavas was being guided by the ethos of nationalism. The entire ambience of Muthukulam session including the cultural programmes conducted in connection with the session was effective in ensuring large scale participation of Ezhava masses. This proved to be an open gesture legitimizing the values of Hinduism and national movement. This session also acceded, though not consciously that the representation of Avarnas could only be possible through the mediation of national movement. The cultural programmes were intended in one way or other defended the struggle against the British. Such cultural praxis in fact negated the ideologies of Avarna philosophy and its criticism against the national culture.⁴²

Desabhimani gave wide publicity to this session. The publicity campaign was started well in advance of the session. It also published the special request of the General Secretary and gave the details of the session. It informed that Vallathol Narayana Menon and Kurror Neelakantan Namboodiripad would attend the meeting as the representatives of Hindu religion and that they would be received properly.⁴³ In the path breaking study on nation and nationalism, Ernest Gellner locates the role of culture in reviving the sense of nationalism and making the nation possible. He observed nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on a society, whose previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population.⁴⁴

⁴¹ P.K.Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.426-27.

⁴² D.R.Nagaraj, 1993. *The Flaming Feet: A study of the Dalit Movement India*, Bangalore, South Forum Press, pp.65-66.

⁴³ *Desabhimani*, 3 May 1925.

⁴⁴ Ernest Gellner, 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, p.57.

Largely deviated from the earlier ones, the annual meeting of SNDP Yogam held at Muthukulam appeared like a Congress session. The hall in which the meeting was held was arranged in the style of a Congress meeting. 'The six annual sessions of SNDP Yogam namely Karunagapally, Muthukulam, Eramallore, Pallathuruthu, Neyyattinkara and Kottayam were organised by Madhvan. All these sessions were conducted in the manner in which the sessions of Indian National Congress were conducted.'⁴⁵ Muthukulam session was held while Vaikom Satyagraha was going on and as such Madhavan was very keen to give a nationalist aura to everything done in the session. The cultural programmes of all the three days bore strong Hindu religious traits. On all these days *Harikatha Kalakshepam** was performed.⁴⁶ Apart from *Harikatha Kalakshepam* other notable items were dramas (Farce). '*Haridasi*' (the farce which highlights evils of liquor) and '*Vaikom Satyagraha*' farce were performed. T.K. Madhavan was one of the actors in the latter one.⁴⁷

Organizational resurgence anchored in the Hindu cultural value sphere, led by T.K. Madhavan had been considered as a great service to Ezhava community by the SNDP Yogam leadership. This endorsement of SNDP Yogam was a critical moment in modern Kerala history. An organization which represented a community, largely instrumental in changing the course of modern Kerala society turned out to facilitate the integration of the community with stream of nationalism. The phenomenal studies of Gellner on nation and

⁴⁵ K.N. Prakasham, 'SNDP Yogam Anchu Ghattangal' (Five Stages of SNDP Yogam), *SNDP Yogam GJS*, 1953. p.57.

**Hari*, an incarnation of *Vishnu*, the most important God in Hindu pantheon. He is the source of Universe. He sleeps in the primeval ocean on the thousand headed snake *Sesa*. In his sleep a lotus grows from his navel and in the lotus is born the demi-urge *Brahma*, who enters the world.

⁴⁶ A.L. Bhasham, 1981. *The Wonder that was India*, New Delhi, Rupa & Co., pp.302-09.

In *Harikatha Kalakshepam*, the stories related to Vishnu and his incarnations are narrated in prose and poetic style. A primordial version of *Kathaprasangam*, the most popular form of entertainment and the effective way to convey a message to people. T.K. Madhavan while organizing the SNDP Yogam, widely employed this method to mobilize the people.

⁴⁷ *Desabhimani*, 16 May 1925.

nationalism repeatedly revealed the role of culture in invoking the sense of belonging to nation.

'It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round. Admittedly, nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored....'⁴⁸

Thus the organizational rejuvenation process of a subaltern community was made by reinventing the culture and traditions of dominant sections. Strangely this is considered as a part of social reform initiatives of Kerala. Considering this aspect, the following observation requires attention, 'the social reform discourse made the modern Hindu community possible by ushering a new sacred geography fitted into an emerging bourgeois public sphere'.⁴⁹

The process of nationalizing the community did not go without serious challenge. C. Krishnan lambasted this effort while delivering the presidential address in the Muthukulam session. Radicals within the community including C. Krishnan were fully aware of the danger of integration of the Ezhava community into the nationalist mainstream. They opposed a claim of common culture and tradition. They considered this claim only as a ploy to de-legitimize the distinct identity and cultural tradition of their community. 'Hindu nationalism is defined as an ideology that seeks to imagine or construct a community (i.e. a nation) on the basis of a common culture.'⁵⁰

The 27th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Pullathurathu in Alleppey in May 1927 was also organised under the complete supervision of T.K. Madhavan. By this time he had been appointed as the Organizing

⁴⁸ Ernest Gellner, *op.cit.*, pp.55-56.

⁴⁹ Muralidharan.M., 'Hindu Community Formation in Kerala: Processes and Structures under Colonial Modernity' *South Indian Studies*, July – December 1996, Issue No.2, p.256.

⁵⁰ John Zavos, 2000. *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, OUP, New Delhi, p.5.

Secretary of SNDP Yogam. This session assumed a historic dimension as Narayana Guru attended this session. Guru was attending an SNDP Yogam after a long gap and Pullathurathu was the last session he attended. The conduct of this session was meticulously planned and executed by Madhavan. As he was camping in Kuttanad area in connection with organizational work, the planning and execution of the session was made easy. The annual session was held at the premises of a temple owned by Ezhavas. For the purpose of this session a special boat jetty was arranged in the Quilon- Alleppey boat route. The presence of Narayana Guru attracted huge crowd to this session. Overflow meetings were arranged to make deliberations audible to the crowd.⁵¹ Similar accounts were furnished by C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar who attended the session⁵² and also by the official biographer of SNDP Yogam.⁵³

Cultural events were held on all the three days in Pallathuruthu also more or less similar to that of Eramallone and Muthukulam. The cultural programmes attracted large number of people as intended by the organizers. The organizers, anticipating heavy rush to the cultural programme, regulated the entry to venue by tickets. People thronged into venue disregarding restrictions, resulted in stampede and commotion. All efforts to control the mob failed and finally N. Kumaran, the General Secretary instructed to stop the entertainment programme and admonished the errant mob.⁵⁴

In a message to the Pallathuruthu session Narayana Guru stressed the need of 'one caste, one religion and one God'. He said, 'for those who believe that their hardship and inequality will be solved by converting to other faiths can consider *Sanathana Dharma* as their religion and that would be their conversion and independence.'⁵⁵

⁵¹ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.428-431.

⁵² C.R.Kesavan Vaidyar, 'Sangatanayude Shilpi'(Architect of the Organisation), *Vivekodayam*, 1985, pp.5-8.

⁵³ P.S.Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No.32, pp.28-29.

⁵⁴ N.K.Damodaran, *op.cit.*No.11, pp.464-65.

⁵⁵ P.K.Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.430-31.

The Kottayam session of SNDP Yogam (26th session 6-8, May 1929) was more important on many counts. It was the first session since the death of Narayana Guru and the last session organised and attended by T.K. Madhavan and presided over by Dr. Palpu. The membership of SNDP Yogam went up to 60348 as on 31 December 1928, a great leap indeed, achieved due to the untiring work of Madhavan as the Organizing Secretary. By this time Dr. Palpu had distanced himself from the activities of SNDP Yogam. It was T.K. Madhavan who invited Dr. Palpu to this session. Madhavan was in Trivandrum for some time during the month of March 1929 with Dr. Palpu at the latter's residence. This short stay paved the way for writing a biography of Palpu by Madhavan, considered to be a seminal work.⁵⁶

Kottayam session of SNDP Yogam generated controversies and uproar among the community as impacts of the speech delivered by Madan Mohan Malaviya. T.K. Madhavan invited Malaviya and was very particular in having Malaviya's presence at the session. Malaviya as the practice in North India tried to kindle the passions of the Hindu religion in his speech. The ultra Hindu leader's speech was indeed disturbing for the Ezhavas. Forgetting the community that provided him the platform he asked the audience to chant the name 'Rama'. Unprecedented protests followed. To the Ezhavas who attended the session it was a shock. Malaviya was delivering his speech at the 'temple entry conference' one among the many conferences convened in connection with the annual session. C. Kesavan, one of the stalwarts of SNDP Yogam after T.K. Madhavan and the architect of Abstention movement, participated in this session. He recalled later.

'One annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Kottayam under the leadership of T.K. Madhavan. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was present at this session and I was also

⁵⁶ T.K. Madhavan, 1929. *Dr. Palpu Jeeva Charitram* (Biography of Dr. Palpu), Revised & Enlarged by Pallippat Kunjukrishnan, 1969. Mavelikkara, pp. IX-XII. (*Forward to the first edition*)

present. Malaviya, as the prophet of 'Sanatana Hindu religion' was campaigning in South India to raise fund for Benaras Hindu University. T.K. Madhavan was leaning towards 'Sanathanatnam'. By that time Ezhavas also raised the demand for an independent community and some stood for Buddhism. Progressive and rationalists among the Ezhavas had also raised casteless, religionless and Godless concepts. Malaviya, the big Hindu leader landed in Kerala amidst all these developments. He started saying that Hindu religion was immortal, ancient and supremely holy etc and he wanted to establish that there was no other path of liberation except *Rama Rajya*. Sahodaran Ayyappan instantaneously retorted with full vigour 'we don't want Rams's *Ramarajya*, who brutally killed Shudra Muni. *Ravana Rajya* is far better than the *Rama Rajya*'. There was a huge revolt in that meeting.⁵⁷

More or less a similar account was given by P.S. Velayudhan. Malaviya advised untouchable castes to chant the name of Rama, which he considered as their *Mochana Mantra*. At this point one of the audience shouted '*Ravana Ki Jai*' and thousands repeated. Malaviya abruptly stopped his speech and retired to his seat. It was with utmost efforts of leaders including Ayyappan, the crowd could be restrained.⁵⁸

Madhavan's expectations went wrong, though he was able to control the nucleus of SNDP Yogam. Madhavan consistently championed the cause of Hindu religion within his community and always wanted to retain Ezhavas in the Hindu fold. His attempts in this direction achieved significant gains till then. But one could not expect anything else from a community like Ezhavas in Kerala at a situation like what they encountered at Kottayam session. The spirit of the struggle they waged for social existence still remained, the protest at Kottayam tellingly showed this. But the leadership of Yogam towards the close of 1920's was in no way able to pursue the spirit of assertion of the community. On the other hand concentration had been given to build the organization only and any intervention from the side of radicals received little support from SNDP Yogam. But the legacy and implications of the struggle waged by the

⁵⁷ C.Kesavan, *op.cit.*, pp.311-12.

⁵⁸ P.S.Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No.32, p.29.

community couldn't be easily erased. The day today life experience of Ezhavas prevented them from integrating totally with the Hindu fold.

The Kottayam incident strengthened the polarization with in the community. This gave a boost to the morale of radicals, who wanted to sever link with nationalism and Hindu religion .This reminds us again of the complexities involved in the process of community formation of Ezhavas. C.V. Kunjuraman, a life long associate of T.K. Madhavan who stood by him in many crises, also openly expressed his displeasure towards Madhavan on the issue of Malaviya's speech. It indeed paved the way for the resurgence of anti-Hindu feelings among the community. C. Kesavan and V.K. Velayudhan were the prominent leaders who spearheaded this campaign. In the context of Kottayam incident the prominent community poet Pallathu Raman wrote the poem *Ravanaayanam*. Karthikeyan observed that T.K. Madhavan's efforts to bring Ezhavas under the fold of *Sanatana* Hindu religion proved to be a failure. Immediately after T.K. Madhavan's period the community drifted away from the Hindu fold and became a part of *Muppiri Samyuktham*⁵⁹ (Christian, Muslim and Ezhava alliance) that led the famous Abstention movement under the able leadership of C. Kesavan.

Unresolved Grievances: Activities and Conflicts

T.K Madhavan's public life became hectic once again when he was made the secretary of Public Service Bureau (PSB) by the SNDP Yogam. Madhavan took up the assignment just before he was appointed as the Organising Secretary of the Yogam. Madavan accepted the assignment as the secretary of PSB consequent to the decision taken by SNDP Yogam in its 23rd annual session held at Quilon on 7-9 May 1926. The bureau was constituted to

⁵⁹ K.Karthikeyan, *op.cit.*, pp.190-91.

take stock of the Ezhava representation in government service and to initiate negotiations with government to redress the grievances of the community.⁶⁰

A brief discussion in this regard is required to see the condition of Ezhavas even in late 1920's and also to unravel the internal conflicts of Madhavan. As a nationalist he was not in favour of the idea of communal representation in government jobs, but was forced to demand it as the leader of Ezhava of community.⁶¹

Right from the beginning SNDP Yogam openly declared that it wanted two of its demands to be accepted, i.e, Ezhavas must get equal opportunities with others and they should be allowed to enjoy the same benefits given to the converts.⁶² These demands were raised as early as in 1905. The attempt here is not to historicize the grievances and agitations but to look into activities of T.K. Madhavan during 1926-27, or till he assumed the charge of Organizing Secretary.

T.K. Madhavan right from the time he started *Deshabhimani* in 1915 campaigned through it for the Ezhava representation in government service. The most important and much acclaimed editorials of the paper highlighted this issue. Details about this are discussed in chapter 1. The most famous editorial in this line appeared in *Deshabhimani* on 28 October 1916 and a flood of writings came out since then. The paper always criticized the double standard of government's policy. To save its face government almost as a routine issued instructions to heads of departments, to look into Ezhavas' demand for adequate representation more favourably. On the other hand the heads of departments never bothered to implement the government's directions and the government took no action over them, though it knew fully well about the apathy of the

⁶⁰ *Desabhimani*, 16 May 1924.

⁶¹ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.479.

⁶² Editorial Notes, 'Thiruvitamkooor Governmentum Ezhavarum'(Travancore Govt. and Ezhavas), *Vivekodayam*, May 1905 (30 Medom 1080 M.E), Book No.2, Issue No.1, pp.1-2.

heads of departments. Desabhimani detailed the history of the demand of Ezhavas for government employments. It had furnished graphic accounts of the agitation. This particular editorial vividly narrated the discrimination suffered by Ezhavas in getting government employment especially in medical department. It urged the government of Travancore to take necessary action in this regard.⁶³

Even during the height of Vaikom Satyagraha, Desabhimani tried to project the plight of under representation of Ezhavas in government service. While Madhavan was languishing in the central prison, Trivandrum in connection with the satyagraha, Desabhimani wrote an exasperated editorial. "..... And therefore if the government has genuine intention to redress the grievances and improve the conditions of Ezhavas and other backward communities, then the government must offer jobs in proportion to their population. Government must also give special consideration and priority to their rights". Analysing the vigour of the non-Brahmin agitation witnessed in Tamilnadu, Desabhimani observed that the demands of the Ezhavas were neither unjust nor excessive.⁶⁴

T.K. Madhavan worked as the Secretary of PSB continuously for six months. He painstakingly collected the number and details of Ezhavas in various government departments and made calculation about the share due to them. To study the question of under-representation of Ezhavas, he collected the relevant documents and government publications with an academic resoluteness.⁶⁵

At the outset T.K. Madhavan logically countered the government's position that there were not enough Ezhavas available to appoint in government service. Madhavan argued that Ezhavas were denied education for decades and

⁶³ Desabhimani, 25 November 1925.

⁶⁴ Desabhimani, 22 August 1924.

⁶⁵ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.458-59.

thus denied access to employment opportunities resulting in the non-availability of qualified Ezhavas to be appointed in government service. So according to him the need was that the government should immediately initiate steps to ensure special protection in government appointments for Ezhavas.

In a powerful attack to the government's policy towards Ezhavas on school admission and employment, Desabhimani observed 'in the yester years the only way to get government employment is to be wealthy and influential. The situation had not changed even in these days of splendid isolation'. The paper added that the present policy of the government denied opportunity to Ezhavas and it was a great crime.⁶⁶

T.K. Madhavan had also perused the debates held in Travancore Legislative Council (TLC) regarding the attitude of heads of departments in providing opportunities to Ezhavas. In practice the heads of departments openly flouted the directions of the government as such the claim of the government was never fulfilled. Desabhimani also criticized the traditional policy followed by the state for a long time. This itself proved to be the worst deterrent factor in the welfare of Ezhavas.

On 4 August 1926 PSB organised a grand meeting at LMS hall, Trivandrum. This meeting was attended by members of TLC (TLC was in session that day) and other prominent personalities from various communities. The meeting passed resolutions urging the government to ensure that the authorities' concerned should not flout its directions. As Ezhavas were the most under represented community, the resolution demanded that they should be given priority in the ensuing vacancies. The meeting further asked that there should be at least one person from Ezhava community in the post of Dewan Peischar, Huzur Secretary, District judge and Head of Department.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Desabhimani*, 31 July 1926.

⁶⁷ P.K.Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.469-70.

Madhavan's speech at this meeting amply justified the Ezhava demand for further representation in public service. He said 'from the budget estimate presented last Monday by the Finance Secretary in the Legislative Council, it is learned that an average eighty lakh rupees had been spent to meet the salary of the government employees. If population percentage is to be reckoned Ezhavas must get fourteen lakh rupees as their salary, but received only less than fifty thousand rupees'.⁶⁸

In his capacity as the secretary of PSB, T.K. Madhavan drafted the famous memorial and presented it to Dewan. The memorial was prepared after thorough scrutiny of various government records and official publications. He conclusively established the fact that the Ezhavas were under-represented in government service.⁶⁹ Madhavan's effort as the Secretary of PSB had brought some tangible results. Government assured that the grievances raised in the memorial would be looked into, while giving a reply to this memorial on 26 October 1926. The pressure from PSB was too irresistible to government and it took some favourable steps and the credit was due to T.K. Madhavan.

Expansion of SNDP Yogam: New Dimension of the Community

The growth of SNDP Yogam under the leadership of T.K. Madhavan during 1927-29 underscores a major shift in the history of Ezhava community as well as in the course of modern history of Travancore. SNDP Yogam achieved phenomenal growth in terms of membership thanks to Madhavan's untiring work as the Organising Secretary of the Yogam. The growth also made the community to reach a point from where it found very difficult to get back to its foundational spheres. This trajectory recurred the history of the region also. The strategies and methods employed to mobilize the community were largely

⁶⁸ *Desabhimani*, 20 August 1926.

⁶⁹ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.471-72.

responsible in creating this turn. The impact of that turn though not visible in apparent terms, reoriented the sensibility of the most potential community of modern Kerala.

The strategies employed by Madhavan to mobilize the Ezhavas had also led to the integration of the community with Hinduism inextricably. Madhavan's strong affiliation with Indian National Congress was decisive in achieving this. Madhavan became an avowed nationalist in the last phase of his public life. The nationalist movement which 'consciously promoted an idea of common religious identity',⁷⁰ had a profound influence on T.K. Madhavan. The construction of common religious identity proved as a soft task in the wake of anti-colonial struggle. This facilitated the protection of both structural and normative aspects of caste system. The orthodox section wanted to protect both aspects as they considered it as the essence of Hinduism and so the destruction of one would mean the annihilation of the other.⁷¹

The construction of common religious identity of Hindus sidelined the assertions by various communities for their identity and self representation, which would have led to the annihilation of the caste structure. The expansion of SNDP Yogam and the construction of Hindu religious identity for the community had intricate connections due to the strategies of T.K. Madhavan. This resulted in the deviation of Yogam from its foundational spheres. This further enabled Indian National Congress and then the Communist Party to tighten its grip over the community. To the Communists the process started from Kuttanad, where T.K. Madhavan began his activity as the Organizing Secretary and accomplished his task effectively.

⁷⁰ Sebastian C.H. Kim, 2003. *In search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India*, New Delhi, OUP, p.25.

⁷¹ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'Caste, Widow – remarriage and the Reform of Popular Culture' in Bharati Ray (ed.), 1997. *From the Seams of History: Essays on India Women*, New Delhi, OUP, p.25.

Organizational weakness was taken up as a matter of serious concern by the Yogam leadership since Kumaran Asan relinquished from the helm of affairs. It was a fact that the numerical strength of SNDP Yogam remained far below compared to its demographical status. But the community had significant gains during the time of early leadership. As a community Ezhavas asserted and captured its space in the society. SNDP Yogam, as an organisation registered a slow growth. In the 2nd annual session the General Secretary reported that there were 621 members enrolled till then. In the first year (1903-04) 442 members enrolled and in 1904-05 only 179 became members.⁷²

T.K. Madhavan assiduously tried to revamp the organisation since he was appointed as the Assistant Secretary of SNDP Yogam in 1921 and it brought telling effects. He individually wrote letters to his friends and well wishers requesting their help and support to achieve the end. In a letter to Muloor S. Padmanabha Panicker (1868-1931), Madhavan sought his help to organize local meetings to start new units at Tiruvalla. He had also mentioned about the ensuing SNDP session at Eramallore to be held in May 1922.⁷³ In another letter Madhavan requested Muloor's presence to a reception committee meeting to be held prior to the session. Madhavan mentioned in the letter that though he knew that Muloor could not attend the meeting, the notice was only to achieve larger participation. So he requested Muloor at least to send a message in writing to the meeting.⁷⁴

The activities of T.K. Madhavan as the Assistant Secretary earned wide acclaim and his service was sought from many places. The organizational work suffered much as he was engaged in the activities related to Vaikom sathyagraha since the beginning of 1924. Ezhavas felt dejected as they realized

⁷² *Vivekodayam*, January-February 1905 (30 *Makarom* 1080 M.E), Book No.1, Issue No.5, p.95.

⁷³ T.K. Madhavan, Letter to Muloor S. Padhmanabha Panickar (Hereafter called as Muloor), dated, 12 *Makarom* 1097 M.E (January 1922), Researcher's Private Collection (Hereafter called RPC)

⁷⁴ T.K. Madhavan, Letter to Muloor, dated, 23 *Meenom* 1097 M.E (April 1927), RPC.

that their problems would not be solved through sathyagraha. This had also forced the Yogam leadership to reorient their attention to revamp the organisation T.K. Madavan also wrote a strong editorial inviting the attention of Ezhavas to the need for a strong community organisation. He devised many methods to be followed to reorganize SNDP Yogam.⁷⁵

To strengthen the organization, the SNDP Yogam decided to convene a special session at Alleppey and accordingly a preparatory meeting was held on 16 November 1926. In this meeting Madhavan eloquently established the need for a strong organization. The special session of SNDP Yogam was held at Kidangamparambu in Alleppey on 1-2 January 1927 (17-18 Dhanu 1101 ME). As per the resolution No: 12, Yogam decided to appoint T.K. Madhavan as the Organizing Secretary.⁷⁶ The resolution expressed its profound anguish over the number of members in SNDP Yogam. It also entrusted Madavan to enroll fifty thousand members within a year and authorized him to take appropriate and necessary steps to achieve this end.

The decision of this session was considered historic. It inaugurated a new phase called *Sanghatana Ghattam* (Organization Period). In this stage the Yogam leadership concentrated their efforts in organisation building. There was no agitation for social rights and all the factors involved to mobilize organisation helped the process of Hinduization of the community. The period in which Madhavan was Organizing Secretary heralded a new turn in the history of Sree Narayana movement. Death of Narayana Guru (20 September 1928) and the tussle between SNDP Yogam and *Sanyasi Dharma Sangham* of Sivagiri had also complicated the matters in this period.

The efforts and activities to achieve the target of recruiting the magic number of fifty thousand new members by T.K. Madhavan were popularly

⁷⁵ Editorial, 'Ezhavarude Shraddakku' (For the Attention of Ezhavas), *Desabhimani*, 29 August 1925.

⁷⁶ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.481-91, also see P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No. 18, pp.232, ff 43.

known as *Sanghatana Prastathanam* (Organizational Movement). The activities of *Sanghatana Prastathanam*, had been officially inaugurated by Sree Narayana Guru at Sivagiri on 2 February 1927. Delighted over the new assignment Madhavan wrote letters to well wishers of SNDP Yogam. He invited Muloor to Sivagiri meeting and requested his solidarity in the forth coming ventures.⁷⁷

Narayana Guru handed over a message dated 1 February 1927 to this meeting in which he reiterated the need for a strong organisation without which he said no community would prosper. He had also observed that the name Ezhava, did not indicate a caste or religion and as such there was no objection to enroll persons from other caste and religion.⁷⁸

The meeting at Sivagiri adopted a resolution inviting T.K. Madhavan to start organizational work from Kuttanad during 8 February 1927 to 1 March 1927. It also requested the Organising Secretary to initiate steps to protect freedom and security of the Ezhava labourers.⁷⁹ The organisation work started accordingly in Kuttanad with the help of Cheru Kalil Kunjukrishnan, the popular Ezhava leader in Kuttanad. C.K.Kunjukrishnan led several struggles in Kuttanad. His sister Janaki Amma was also regarded in high esteem because of her association with the peasant and labour movement. Her home was later used as a shelter to several Communists' leaders, who were gone underground.⁸⁰ T.K. Madhavan also admitted that without the help of Ezhavas of Kuttanad the organisation movements could not have been started.⁸¹

While presenting the organisation report in the 25th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Neyyattinkara (May 1928), Madhavan narrated his encounter with Rama Subbayar, secretary to government, finance department.

⁷⁷ T.K. Madhavan, Letter to Muloor, dated. 13 Makarom 1102M.E (28 January 1927), RPC.

⁷⁸ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.498.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.498-99.

⁸⁰ N.K. Kamalasanan, *op.cit.*, pp.49-51 and p.60.

⁸¹ P.K.Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.496-97.

He met Rama Subbayar in his capacity as the secretary a Public Service Bureau and apprised him of the difficulties of Ezhavas in getting government jobs in audit offices. When Rama subbayyar asked his propriety for such a demand Madhavan answered that he was the secretary of PSB of SNDP Yogam. Then the finance secretary asked about the total membership of SNDP Yogam and Madavan answered that it was 4200. Finance secretary proceeded that if the total membership of SNDP Yogam was only 4200 then the organisation did not represent the Ezhavas. Rama subbayar reminded Madhavan that the total population of Ezhavas in Travancore alone was around 7 lakhs. This convesation had made a telling impact on Madavan. When he was appointed as the Organizing Secretary he fixed a target and chalked out a plan to achieve the desired membership for SNDP Yogam.

T.K. Madhavan's plan was exactly a replica of the programme of Indian National Congress and he admitted that the proposed plan to revamp SNDP Yogam was an imitation of the programme of INC. The Congress' proposed to enroll one crore members within a year and its other programmes were eradication of untouchability and propagation of *Khaddar*. While Madavan's programme was to enroll of one lakh members in SNDP Yogam, temple entry to all Hindus, total prohibition and encouragement of cottage industries. But the special session of SNDP Yogam which appointed T.K. Madhavan as Organizing Secretary admitted only one item of the Madhavan's programme; i.e., enrollment of members and the quota was fixed as fifty thousand for a year.⁸²

T.K. Madhavan had an idea of revamping the organisation well before he was appointed the Organizing Secretary. The paradigm he borrowed to revitalize the community was national. It is in a way a blanket admission of irrepresentability of the oppressed castes, as if legitimizing the argument that the oppressed castes could not be represented by themselves. That he accepted a replica of nationalist model for his community was a clear indication that T.K.

⁸² P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.491-96 and see P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.No.18*, pp.233-36, ff.49.

Madhavan had internalized the values of national movement. National movement always urged each group to transcend their distinct identity to have a homogenized community. Discussing the intricate relation between caste and modern nation Susan Bayly wrote, 'when India's aspiring nation builders discussed their goals, they generally appealed to an impersonal public audience which was supposed to be bound by common ties of race, culture and spirituality'.⁸³

Madhavan's activity as Organizing Secretary started in Kuttanad from 8 February 1927. The Ezhavas from the area under the leadership of C.K. Kunjukrishnan extended all sorts of support to T.K. Madhavan. The members of local Ezhava organization, *Sanmarga Prakashini Sabha* of Pulinkunnu Kunnummal themselves enrolled as members of SNDP Yogam and extended financial assistance. Madhavan admitted that Ezhavas of Pulinkunnu kunnummal could earnestly claim that they were instrumental in building a big movement, which benefited the community in a long way.⁸⁴ The harrowing living conditions of Ezhavas of Kuttanad had also prompted Madhavan and Yogam leaders to begin the work from Kuttanad. The major chunk of Ezhava population was labourers, who reeled under the oppression of their land lords, mostly Nairs and Christians.⁸⁵ More over in Kuttanad a number of local Ezhava organisations functioned actively. These organisations spread progressive ideas and instilled confidence among the community members.⁸⁶

The first meeting in connection with organizational movement was held at Veliyanad in Kuttanad on 8 February 1927.⁸⁷ The work inaugurated at

⁸³ Susan Bayly, 1999 Rpt.(2005), *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (The New Cambridge History of India IV.3) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.154.

⁸⁴ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.496-97.

⁸⁵ P.S.Velayudhan, *op.cit.*, No.18, p.237.

⁸⁶ N.K. Kamalasanan, *op.cit.*, p.49.

⁸⁷ Kuttanad is a *Taluk* as per Revenue Division, but this region spread over eight *Taluks*, ie, Ambalapuzha, Changanasseri, Kottayam, Karthikapally, Mavelikkara, Cherthala, Thiruvalla and Vaikom. There is a common geographical and cultural entity prevails over Kuttanad region.

See, N.K. Kamalasanan, *op.cit.*, pp.5-6.

Veliyanad, observed C.V. Kunjuraman, then Assistant Secretary of SNDP Yogam as an endeavor which 'enlightened the community by raking up its basic structure'. Within a month some 3100 members were enrolled from Kuttanad itself. This is equal to that of total members already enrolled in SNDP Yogam since 1903.⁸⁸ Kuttanad SNDP Union was formed by affiliating twenty five branch Yogams and the first union office was established at Narakathra Krishnapuram.⁸⁹

To facilitate the organizational work T.K. Madhavan and his team also engaged in local issues involving the grievance of Ezhavas. Issues related to various kinds of oppression by the land lords existed in this region. Madhavan could not go ahead with his work without addressing these issues. The interventions in specific issues of Ezhavas in Kuttanad were not in the larger interest of Ezhavas in general. Moreover these interventions were not pursued consistently by the leadership which paved the way for other forces to occupy this space. When we look into details of agricultural labour movement under the leadership of the Communist Party in Kerala, this would be revealed.

The strategies and methods employed by T.K. Madavan to mobilise the community were unprecedented and proved to be most effective. C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar, vividly narrated the details of such strategies and methods of the organisational work and considered them to be most scientific. Himself a member of the volunteer corps (*Dharma Bhatanmar*) C.R. Kesavan Vaidayar actively associated with this work. According to him the services of the volunteer corps in establishing "*Karayoagams*" (Branch level Units) were invaluable. The membership fee was fixed as five rupees and one rupee was accepted as first installment. The Kuttanad mission of T.K. Madhavan accomplished with huge success within a month.⁹⁰ Other aspects that helped for the success of the organizational works were the extraordinary oratorical skill of Madhavan, witty and eloquent speeches of K.P. Kayyalakkal in the meetings

⁸⁸ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No.18, p.240.

⁸⁹ N.K. Kamalasanan, *op.cit.* p.54.

⁹⁰ C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar, *op.cit.* p.237.

and above all Sree Satyavrathan's *Harikatha* narrations in the cultural programme conducted after the conclusion of the meetings. All these particularly the *Harikatha* narrations attracted large number of audience.⁹¹

The cultural events conducted in connection with the meetings inculcated the values of Hindu religion into the Ezhavas. Cultural imageries of nation were the spirit behind these events, which in turn strengthened the idea of nation. The national and religious consciousness created an identity crisis for Ezhavas. Hectic organizational activities helped them to get over the identity crisis to an extent. Caste memories were sidetracked for 'collective memory', which Ernest Gellner considers, plays an important part in the formation of 'nation'.⁹² The cultural events also tried to create an impression that the Hindu traditional values were not against oppressed castes. But 'for the lower castes and subordinate groups a refashioning of Hindu tradition may still leave unresolved the question of their subalternity'.⁹³

From Kuttanad Madhavan and his team proceeded to Karunagapally, where within days nearly 4000 persons were enrolled as SNDP Yogam members.⁹⁴ Hectic organizational work caused serious health hazards to Madhavan, whose physical condition was already deteriorated. Despite acute '*asthma*' he worked almost eighteen hours daily, but never bothered about his health.⁹⁵

The organizational work in Alleppey became historic as T.K Madhavan also led the Ezhava peasant labourers struggle. Madhavan and his contingent reached Alleppey on 17 April 1927. The labourers' condition in this region was horrible as they were subjected to various kinds of oppression from the land lords. T.K. Madhavan organised them and the strike of the peasant labourers

⁹¹ M.K. Narayanan, *op.cit*, No.33, p.153.

⁹² Ernest Gellner, 1982. 'Nationalism and the Two Forms of Cohesion in Complex Societies', *Proceedings of British Academy* 68, pp.165-87.

⁹³ Dilip M.Menon, 'Religion and Colonial Modernity: Rethinking Belief and Identity', *Economic and Political weekly*, 27 April 2002, p.1666.

⁹⁴ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.503-04.

⁹⁵ T.K. Madhavan, Letter to Mulloor, dated, 13 Chingom 1103 M.E (August 1927), RPC.

started on 23 April 1927 was first of its kind in Kuttanad region. Work in the paddy fields came to a grinding halt. The strike continued for the next five days. Finally land lords were forced to make compromise with labourers and the strike ended in favour of the latter. These labourers were enrolled as members of SNDP Yogam and affiliated under Nilamperur branch.⁹⁶

Madhavan had also co-ordinated activities for the conduct of the 24th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Palluthuruthu in May 1927. It was so challenging to discharge duties of Organizing Secretary and reception committee chairman at the same time. Just before the conduct of the Pallithuruthu session, he wrote in a letter that till that time there were nine thousand members were enrolled and hoped that it would fetch ten thousand by the time of the session. He had also expressed his happiness over Narayana Guru's willingness to attend the session.⁹⁷ It was T.K. Madhavan's effort that brought Narayana Guru to the session, which happened to be the last session attended by him.

Madhavan was not simply content with enrolling members to Yogam. He attempted to build a solid organizational structure for the SNDP Yogam. He organized *Taluk* Unions to effectively co-ordinate the *Shaka* (branch) Yogams and its activities. Under a Union, the whole *Shaka* Yogams were brought in and affiliated*. To meet the financial needs of the community Madhavan made initiatives to start community co-operative societies.⁹⁸

As a master organizer with enormous potential, T.K. Madhavan devised plans for a structured SNDP Yogam and chalked out programmes for its sustainability. He requested N.Kumaran the General Secretary of SNDP

⁹⁶ S. Suvarna Kumar, 'SNDP Yogathinte Karshaka Thozilai Samaram Nayicha' T.K. Madhavan' (T.K. Madhavan who led the agitation of Peasant Labourers' of SNDP Yogam) *T.K. Madhavan Pratima Stapana Smarhika*, 1991. Vaikom, pp.85-86.

⁹⁷ T.K. Madhavan, Letter to Muloor, dated, 17 Medom 1102M.E (May 1927), RPC.

*The structure of SNDP Yogam from branch level to the top echelon had been meticulously framed by T.K. Madhavan and he presented it in the Neyyattinkara session of SNDP Yogam (May 1928), which is famously called as *Organisation Scheme* of T.K. Madhavan.

⁹⁸ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No.18, p.240.

Yogam to appoint suitable persons as organizers and assistant organizers to help and support Organizing Secretary. He had also recommended that K.S. Velayudhan and C.K. Kunjukrishnan were to be appointed as Organizer and Assistant Organizer respectively.⁹⁹

He started to work in Kottayam by the middle of July 1927 and organised SNDP Unions in all the *Taluks* of Kottayam district. T.K. Madhavan authorized T.K. Kittan Writer as the honorary organizer of Kottayam taluk for a period of one month, (*1 chingom – 1 Kanni 1103 ME*) i.e. August-September 1927. In this regard he wrote a letter to Kittan Writer and explained the works to be done and the strategies to be adopted. He particularly emphasized the need for starting co-operative societies. He wanted Kittan Writer to collect *Pidiyari** and *Kettu Thengu*** to meet the expenditure.¹⁰⁰ One month's time has been given to Kittan Writer to establish thirty branches of Yogam. Within a week five branches were established and this was conveyed to Muloor by Madhavan in a letter.¹⁰¹

During this time C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar and K.R. Narayanan were actively engaged in organization works as *Dharma Bhatanmar* (volunteers). As and when the team of volunteers reached a place, Madhavan convened a district level meeting of SNDP Yogam by inviting leaders and representatives from all

⁹⁹ T.K. Madhavan, Letter to N. Kumaran, dated, 16 March 1927, RPC.

**Pidiyari* (Handful of rice)

Anticipating a guest a handful of rice is spared separately for her/his meal by the female head of the household. Once the Organisation Movement was started in Kuttanad, special attention has been given to this practice in Ezhava houses, so as to enable them to provide a certain quantity of this rice as donation to SNDP Yogam, to be given once in a week or in a month. This practice was later extensively practiced by Communist Party in Kerala and they called it as *Ulpanna Pirviu* (Collection of a share of yields).

***Kettu Thengu* (Tied Coconut Tree) – Those who have coconut trees in their *parambu* (home garden) donates one or two good yielding tree to an Organizational or for a common cause. The entire yield from that tree is meant for the Organisation (here SNDP Yogam). Such earmarked coconut trees are known as *Kettu Tengu*.

¹⁰⁰ T.K. Madhavan, Letter to T.K. Kittan Writer, dated, 20 *Karkkidakom 1102* (19 July 1927), RPC

¹⁰¹ T.K. Madhavan, Letter to Muloor, dated, 13 *Chingam 1103M.E* (August 1927), RPC

Taluks. He urged the representatives to exert some force in the event people showed disinclination to become members. He justified this deed as it was meant for the welfare of the community. C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar narrated an incident, when volunteers insisted a house owner to get enrolled as a member of SNDP Yogam he consistently resisted. This led to some unpleasant exchanges of words and actions between volunteers and the house owner, causing a tense situation and it was later overcome when Madhavan intervened.¹⁰² By this time 107 branch units were organised and these branches were provisionally registered in the Organizing Secretary's camp office.

T.K. Madhavan paid serious attention to the minute details of the organizational matters. His primary concern was the sustainability of the branches already organised, which drove him to chalk out an effective organizational set up with new rules for that. Since no precedence was available in this regard he himself evolved a scheme. New rules were framed for setting up a branch and Madhavan's scheme was accepted in the special session of SNDP Yogam held at Nagambadam, Kottayam in 14-15 January 1928 (*1-2 Makaram 1103 M.E*). The authorisation certificates to 107 branches already affiliated were issued by Sree Narayana Guru.¹⁰³ Madhavan could not attend this special session as he was indisposed and was staying at Pala.¹⁰⁴

The entire machinery of SNDP Yogam centered on *Sanghatana Prasthanam*. Even the most pressing social issues could not be addressed. Whatever attention paid in this direction had confined only in local issues and that too to facilitate the organizational work. Eradication of untouchability and temple entry issues remained only as slogans meant for mere propaganda. A major propaganda measure regarding temple entry, a 'temple entry durbar' (Conference) was held at Trivandrum on 1 April 1926. This was conducted prior to his appointment as the Organizing Secretary. Huge propaganda and

¹⁰² C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar, *op.cit* No.52, p.7.

¹⁰³ M.K. Narayana, *op.cit*. No.33, p.154.

¹⁰⁴ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit*, pp.512-13.

publicity had been given to this conference. The main aim of the conference was to publicize the temple entry message given by Gandhiji to T.K. Madhavan and Kuroor Nilakantan Namboodiripad on their visit to Gandhiji at Sabarmati in January 1926.¹⁰⁵ (See Appendix IV)

The excessive concentration on organisation had invited severe criticism from a section of Ezhavas. One such opposition came from the most unexpected quarter. P.K. Madhavan, (son-in-law and biographer of T.K. Madhavan) close confidant and a strong ally of T.K. Madhavan took strong exceptions to this style of functioning. In a strongly worded article in *Desabhimani*, he observed 'I strongly doubt whether it is good to stop all agitations till we achieve required organizational strength'. He also blamed SNDP Yogam for its total submission to the will of T.K. Madhavan. 'Glory to the struggle waged by T.K. Madhavan and all other agitations are considered as mere ciphers. This is the situation here. It should not continue like this. We want all kinds of agitations. Let Mr. Madhavan revamp the organisation and let Mr. C.V. Kunjuraman and other activists of Yogam may organize the agitation'. He added that it was due to the lack of strength and consistency of the agitation, Ezhavas failed to achieve significant results.¹⁰⁶

The critique of P.K. Madhavan was infact vindicated by *Desabhimani* itself. In the same day it carried an editorial urging the Dewan, M.E. Watts to ensure steps to get adequate representation of Ezhavas in government jobs. It cautioned the government with a proverbial saying, vogue in Travancore, even at this juncture 'if the government thinks to consider Ezhavas as birds waiting for fruits on silk cotton tree (*Elavu Maram*)...' ¹⁰⁷

T.K. Madhavan's organizational work was exemplary in nature and proved as a role model for the future organizational work. Madhavan's

¹⁰⁵ Editorial, 'Kshetra Praveshana Durbar' (Temple Entry Durbar), *Desabhimani*, 3 April 1926.

¹⁰⁶ P.K. Madhavan, 'Nammude Prakshahobangal' (Our Agitations), *Desabhimani*, 6 August 1927.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, 'Mr Watts Ariyuvaan' (To Know Mr. Watts), *Desabhimani*, 6 August 1927.

achievement as Organizing Secretary was phenomenal and unique. He was in constant contact with persons, whose services could be utilized for organisational work. As a shrewd organizer he had noted in his diary the name and addresses of well wishers, supporters as well as those who showed disinclination to associate with SNDP Yogam.¹⁰⁸

The achievement of Madhavan as Organizing Secretary was not only that he enlisted more than fifty thousand persons as members in SNDP Yogam but also that he brought radical structural changes in the organizational pattern of SNDP Yogam.. This facilitated affiliation of newly established branches and the functioning of central organ became comparatively smooth and easy. When Madhavan was appointed as Organizing Secretary SNDP Yogam had only 3878 members. It was because of Madhavan's effort that with in a year, it rose to 50684. The total number of persons enrolled in SNDP Yogam during the tenure of Madhavan as Organizing Secretary was 63374. Madhavan was instrumental in having the present three tier structure of SNDP Yogam ie, branch Yogam (*kara*) Taluk union and Central Council.¹⁰⁹

T.K. Madhavan presented his report in the 25th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Neyyattinkara in 8-10 May 1928 (26-28 Medom 1103M.E). He elaborated the works done till then and outlined a vision statement regarding the rest to be done. This was popularly known as *Organisation Scheme*. He said in his report, 'more than fifty thousand persons were enrolled as members within a year of work. If the organisation work goes on in this phase, another fifty thousand could be enrolled in the coming year and with that the membership of

¹⁰⁸ Personal Diary of T.K. Madhavan, dt. 28 Vrichigom 1103M.E. (November 1927), RPC
He wrote, 'The name and addresses of the persons who refused to take share with SNDP Yogam.

- (1) Kochu Kunju Raman, Nadavilayil, Pannivila, Adoor
- (2) Kizhakkethara Madhavan, Melottumuri, Pallickal, Adoor
- (3) Kollanada Velumban, Melottumuri, Pallickal, Adoor.

The person who promised to give two acres of land to SNDP Yogam as a gift at Mannadi – Gouri Sankar Das, Kalluvettiyl Veedu, Kunnathoor, Mannadi'.

¹⁰⁹ C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar, *op.cit.*, pp.7-8.

SNDP Yogam in Travancore alone would fetch one lakh. The current atmosphere is so congenial for the growth and development of Yogam. Now all community members are extending their whole hearted co-operation and we have to exploit the possibilities of this phase'. He further elaborated his famous Organisation Scheme to make SNDP Yogam more effective and the measures to ensure sustainability of the members already enrolled.¹¹⁰

The Organisation Scheme submitted along with organisation report is rated as one of the most important historical documents as far as SNDP Yogam is concerned. Madhavan had also organised 250 branches spread over fourteen *Taluks*.¹¹¹ To tide over the economic crisis of the community at micro level, he had also established nearly 65 co-operative societies. Madhavan's initiative in this regard is considered as a far-sighted action which had profound impact. Even today it is practiced, though in different forms and names like micro financing system. Among the members who were enrolled by T.K. Madhavan, some two thousand odd persons were women. Non-Ezhavas and Non-Hindus also became members of the SNDP Yogam.¹¹² The organization report gives a graphic account of the growth of SNDP Yogam and as such it is rich source of the history SNDP Yogam during 1927-29.

The organization scheme which Madhavan presented furnishes stipulations on how Yogam, whether Union or branches, were to be functioned effectively, which M.K. Narayanan called as 'grand and imaginative'.¹¹³ The organization scheme envisaged the formation of SNDP Yogam Service, a body responsible for the appointment of persons in charge of discharging duties of SNDP Yogam at various levels. The scheme Madhavan designed was similar to that of public service, the recruiting body of government. The scheme also

¹¹⁰ T.K. Madhavan, 'Organisation Scheme', *Vivekodayam*, January 1929 (*Dhanu* 1104 M.E) Book No. 20, Issue No.1, pp.4-13.

¹¹¹ P.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, p.517.

¹¹² P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No.18, p.242.

¹¹³ M.K. Narayanan, *op.cit.* No.33, p.161.

detailed the duties, selection procedure, educational qualifications of the persons to be appointed and salary pattern to various office bearers including Organizing Secretary and Assistant Organizing Secretary. There should be a Yogam Secretariat, consisting important functionaries of the organization including Organizing Secretary, Finance Secretary, Education Secretary and Political Secretary. The scheme offered Rs.100/- per month as the salary for Organizing Secretary. It further added that the present Organizing Secretary (T.K. Madhavan) should not receive any salary from the Yogam.¹¹⁴ SNDP Yogam befittingly acknowledged the service of T.K. Madhavan and his team through a resolution unanimously adopted in the Neyyattinkara session.¹¹⁵

Since the Neyyattinkara session Madhavan could not continue his organisation work as vigorously as he had done. His worsening health posed a severe challenge to his duties. Due to the leisureless work his illness (acute *asthama*) worsened and developed into a stage of omitting blood frequently. Despite this situation he found time and energy to organize the 26th annual session of SNDP Yogam held at Kottayam in 6-8 May, 1929. It was due to T.K. Madhavan's initiative that Dr. Palpu presided over the session. The new general secretary C.V. Kunjuraman in his annual report, covering a period from January 1928 to December 1928 mentioned that the membership rose to 60348 and profusely lauded T.K. Madhavan's service. The report also rebuked those who criticized the activities of the Yogam.¹¹⁶

Community at Cross Roads

The last phase of T.K. Madhavan's public life became eventful as he transformed the SNDP Yogam into the single largest community organization. But this transformation underscores a turn in the history of the community, the

¹¹⁴ T.K. Madhavan, *op.cit.*, pp.5-12.

¹¹⁵ P.S. Velayudhan, *op.cit.* No.18, p.24, ff 50.

¹¹⁶ *Vivekodayam*, June 1929, Book No.20, Issue No.6, pp.6-12.

side which had been not discussed much. The leadership of Yogam turned its attention to strengthen the organization seriously and took it as an agenda only after the realization of the debacles it suffered from temple entry agitation and Vaikom Satyagraha. As an organization SNDP was able to overcome the setbacks to a certain extent through the organization movement

The growth of SNDP Yogam during the organization movement also contributed in creating a situation of Hinduisation of the community. Hindu religious values and identities percolated down to Ezhava psyche and they imbibed them as normal and natural. There was no conscious, organised and consistent resistance against this process. Though Kottayam session of S.N.D.P Yogam witnessed a protest over Malavya's speech the cultural trends and religious rites practiced by upper castes found increasing acceptance among the Ezhavas.

The cultural imageries of nation so embedded in Hindu religion made strong inroads in the Ezhava community. During the period of organization movement, the cultural events were organized to mobilize the support of the community. Those events made deep influence in changing the psyche of the community. T.K.Madhavan held a strong view that Ezhavas and their movements should extend solidarity with the national movement. This had also helped the process of Hinduisation of Ezhavas. The expansion of SNDP Yogam had lessened the challenge put by Ezhava community towards nationalist movement. As the practices of caste Hindus found increasing acceptance among the Ezhavas, *Vivekodayam* was forced to express its anguish over the situation. At the outset it criticised the practice of celebrating temple festivals by the Ezhavas like the upper castes. It also urged Ezhavas to abandon the lavish and ostentatious way of conducting temple festivals, incurring huge expenditure.¹¹⁷ It reminded the community members that Narayan Guru had established temples only to smash the Brahmin monopoly.

¹¹⁷ Editorial Notes, 'Anukarana Bhramam', *Vivekodayam*, March 1929, pp.8-11.

T.K. Madhavan, being the Organizing Secretary was not directly responsible for the situation mentioned above. But there was no programme launched against such a situation. The criticism of *Vivekodayam* remained a wishful thinking. The entire attention of the leadership had been concentrated in strengthening the organisation only. Stray voices raised alarm over this situation. Certain individuals aired their protest towards SNDP Yogam for not having undertaken political agitations.¹¹⁸ Lack of agitations led to the erosion of caste consciousness and community identity feelings among the Ezhavas and that opened avenues for other forces to influence the community and make inroads in it.

¹¹⁸ P.K. Damodaran, 'Ezhavarum Rashtriya Vaadavum' (Ezhavas and Political Demands), *Vivekodayam*, March 1929, Book No. 20, Issue No.3, pp.108-11.

REFLECTION

The analytical tools usually employed to situate modern Indian history have been developed by the current models of dominant historiographies or the critiques that countered them. These available tools are quite inadequate in mapping the history of modern Travancore.

It is beyond dispute that the modernization and democratization of the Kerala society in general and Travancore in particular was made possible by the social reform initiatives in Kerala. The colonial modernity also played no less significant a role in the process. The Sree Narayana Movement (SNM), prominent among the renaissance movement played a stellar role in engaging Kerala society. It is closely related to the transition process of the Ezhavas who constituted the most dominant community among the subaltern castes of Kerala. This, in turn, led to the transformation of the society as a whole. The present study has as its focus the erstwhile Travancore which was the nerve centre of the SNM. The study intends to bring out the constrictions of the above mentioned historiographies, and hopes to unfold an alternative historiographic model.

The transition process of the Ezhavas spreading over the early decades of the 20th century involves a number of complex factors. It is a unique historical trajectory that witnessed a fight of the oppressed castes against all sorts of social oppression and marginalization to become self determinant authors of their own destinies. The present study has progressed by elucidating the public life of T.K. Madhavan (1885-1930) who had championed the cause of the Ezhava assertions during the most crucial moment in the transition.

Though there were complex and multifaceted entities in the process that influenced the formation of the Ezhava community, it was Madhavan's activities that played a pivotal role in directly linking the community with

religion and nationalism with far reaching consequences. It distanced itself from the social outlook that moulded the foundational ethos of the SNM. It transformed the course of Kerala history in the future as well.

Current historiographies chiefly consider the emergence of such imagined categories as the nation and nationalism (the sense of belonging to one's own nation) as the indisputable criteria of social change in modern India. But the present study envisages that this parameter is inadequate to measure those groups which contextualized the anti-colonial struggle which had virtually constructed the concepts of the nation and nationalism, and the religious, cultural factors on which the nation and nationalism were founded. As against the process of homogenizing various caste groups, it was caste consciousness that enabled these groups to conceive the nation and nationalism in a different way. Nevertheless, the homogenization of various castes has been the precondition of the construction of nationalism. What is meant by caste consciousness is the social living environment acquired by being born in a particular caste. But in the efforts to change this objective environment of social life, nation and national consciousness are not of much concern. The concepts of the nation and nationalism could help to construct an imagined national identity which would not enable the oppressed castes to tide over the social realities and the travails attached to them.

The Ezhavas had been advancing under the leadership of the SNM by incessantly encountering factors detrimental to the process of imagining the nation. The caste advancement and communal consciousness were not conducive to the making of a nation. On the contrary they are obstacles in the path of building a sense of belonging to the nation in individuals or communities.

Unlike in other regions, the retention of the caste system was considered to be the primary duty (*Dharma*) of the state in Travancore and it had been

officially announced in unambiguous terms. In other words, it was the responsibility of the state to perpetuate the inequalities of the caste system and any deviation was considered as a fall from its duty (*Dharmabhramsa*). It is worth noting that Travancore was also 'famously' known as *Dharma Rajya*. That was why caste identity remained a central factor in the movements for change by every community.

As social inequality and caste consciousness are complementary, the efforts by the oppressed castes to change their own social environment invariably led to severe conflicts and prolonged riots with the upper castes. As a consequence, the Ezhavas in many places increasingly opted to seek safe shelter in other religions. Usually conflicts arose when the Ezhavas tried to assert themselves and strongly demanded for their rights, disregarding the age old customs. The second annual conference of the SNDP Yogam concluded at Quilon in January 1905 greatly helped to bolster up their self-respect and assert their rights in public. It has to be particularly stated that it was after this conference that widespread riots erupted between the Ezhavas and the upper caste Nairs in Travancore.

The Ezhavas had to resort to the path of incessant conflicts to obtain freedom of movement, to get admission into schools, to clothe themselves decently and to get their share in public employment. In C. Krishnan's words, Ezhavas were waging a 'war'. There were a few Ezhavas who found religious conversion as a way to circumvent this war. The Ezhavas turned to conversion as a logical culmination of the situation created by these riots. At the same time there were objections to religious conversion from among the leaders of the community. Though Narayana Guru and the SNDP Yogam leadership did not encourage this, we could see a surge of conversion among Ezhavas at different stages. There were also some who tried to retain their Ezhava identity even after conversion. But the SNDP Yogam leadership called up on the members of the community not to allow those converted to have links with the community

and this had the tacit consent of Narayana Guru. The SNDP Yogam had also requested the government that the converted and those who were not converted be given equal consideration in respect of school admission and employment. However, neither the call of the SNDP Yogam nor its request to the government could effectively block conversion. Moreover the SNDP Yogam did not remain rigid in its position on the question of conversion. But T.K. Madhavan effectively tried to further his anti-conversion efforts and formulated practical measures to stem the tide. The SNDP Yogam leadership that assumed office after Kumaran Asan was helpful to him in this regard.

The advent of T.K. Madhavan marked the subversion of the concepts of a nation state differently engaged by the Ezhava community and its caste consciousness which tried to interrogate Hinduism through various means. He undertook the extremely difficult mission of keeping his community within the Hindu fold and at the same time retaining its Ezhava identity. In this mission an engagement linking the Ezhavas with nationalism and Hinduism was inevitable.

Lashing out against the anti-colonial struggle of the Indian National Congress, the SNDP Yogam declared in 1907 that the success of the Congress efforts would take the Ezhavas socially backward for 150 years. It was a declaration possessing a number of historical dimensions, and perhaps it brought to light the fact that at least an organization was thinking aloud about multi-nationalities in the sub-continent. It was this outlook that was bound to change with Madhavan's intervention. Nevertheless, there was a section of the Ezhavas who nurtured such a view on nationalism and a set of leaders who endorsed it in the SNM. Therefore, though Madhavan's intervention had the endorsement of the official leadership, the activities of counter-trends created many complex issues. This flux continued to influence the consciousness and structure of the community.

The foundational position of the SNM was concretized under the influence of objective social conditions. It is when we analyze how it approached the nation and nationalism and what it did to change the existing social condition that we recognize the limitations of current historiographies.

There are plenty of occasions which clearly contextualize the colonial rule and the national movement in the assertions of the Ezhavas. It is to be recalled that these occasions are landmarks in the process of evolution of the Ezhava community. The transition process of the Ezhavas and other castes is outside the binary of nationalism versus colonialism by which the history of modern India is placed. The first decades of the 20th century saw the flowering of community formation process in Travancore. The national movement could impact very little influence here in Travancore during this time.

The standard of social change famously adopted to situate the periodisation in modern Indian history would have to be altered here. Current historiographies contend that it was the contradiction between nationalism and colonialism that initiated social change. However, here social status was fixed by the caste hierarchy and it exerted its influence even at the minutest level of social life. Therefore, social change could be effected by negating this structure. The oppressed castes naturally in the process of changing their status of oppression had to come into conflict with the privileged castes. So we would have to adopt an analytical method focusing on these social tensions, and it would herald the beginning of a new model of historiography.

There is another important factor politically related to it, which must also be pointed out. Recent theses discussed worldwide in connection with the emergence of the modern nation and nationalism, and considered to be universal in nature seem to be not valid in the case of Travancore. Benedict Anderson views the evolution of the nation and nationalism by resolving the far reaching consequences of print. He argues that it is not the commonalities in language,

culture or historical tradition, but print that acts as homogenizing factor to create a sense belonging to a nation. He calls it as 'Print Capitalism' by recalling the historical social change that occurred during the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Nevertheless, in the case of Travancore printing was introduced and developed by strengthening certain factors thought to be diametrically opposite to the making of the nation and nationalism. In Travancore printing had repeatedly reinforced caste consciousness and the advances of each caste achieved through it.

The public life of T.K. Madhavan epitomizes the transition of the Ezhava community. He had tried to deconstruct those factors which brought into existence the identity of the Ezhavas who were the most dominant caste among the subalterns. He had also adopted various and divergent strategies to establish the right of the Ezhavas and to undertake its challenges.

Sharing the general mood prevailed in Travancore, T.K. Madhavan began as a critic of the programme of the Indian National Congress. During the Home Rule movement he problematized and lashed out against it through his paper. So also he was skeptical about Gandhiji's Non Co-operation Movement started in 1919. But as the temple entry demand of the Ezhavas launched at Madhavan's initiative progressed, the developments in the community were not conducive with his perception as he was groomed under the cultural values of Hinduism. He was not prepared to allow the activities of the community to interrogate Hinduism and could not tolerate any injury to it. However he could not clearly conceive at that stage the various aspects of the intricate relationship between religion and nationalism.

Madhavan began to adopt a sympathetic attitude to the Congress and its programmes when he returned from Tirunelveli after meeting Gandhiji. Even as he began to scale down from the temple entry demand to Anti- liquor agitation and later to the struggle for freedom of movement, he categorically declared

that the Congress was the only hope for the Ezhavas and that he was an Indian Swarajist in politics and a Hindu in religious matters. This shift was not accidental. The activities of certain leaders, who began to employ different methods for the emancipation of the community, had raised severe challenges to Madhavan. It might have been the fact that the community was getting out of his control that prompted him to bring the Ezhavas closer to the national movement. The efforts of Ezhavas to overcome the ordeals of untouchability had led to widespread riots and denunciation of Hinduism. But Madhavan declined to understand that the construction of nationalism was not enough to solve the oppressed state of the Ezhavas as a subaltern caste. His family upbringing moulded in the Hindu value system might have had a lasting impact on him.

During the civic right agitation Madhavan had tried to reorient its course by including in its central agenda the temple entry demand for Ezhavas also. The agitation was a powerful surge of the non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus against a regime which considered maintenance and protection of a caste ridden system as its bounden duty or *Rajya Dharma*. The civic right agitation was a crucial step in the process of modernization and democratization of Travancore. This agitation had another historical dimension also. The anti-Muslim and anti-Christian campaign was widely used to broaden the mass base of Indian nationalism. A glaring example is the agitation against partition of Bengal in which militant nationalists got the upper hand. The civic right agitation in Travancore was a deconstruction of this 'othering' process initiated by militant nationalism. The Ezhavas, dominant among the oppressed castes, joined the agitation by uniting with Christians and Muslims.

Crucial moments in the evolution process of the Ezhava community formation are closely related to T.K. Madhavan. He was trying to achieve the consolidation of the community by simultaneously negotiating with Hinduism and nationalism. These negotiations formed a significant trajectory in the

community formation of the Ezhavas, which would otherwise have attained an identity with a different sensibility.

Even before the beginning of the temple entry demand the activities of Sahodaran Ayyappan and Mitavadi Krishnan in Kochi and Malabar had agitated Madhavan's mind and those outside the Ezhava community who had grave concerns on the future of Hinduism. That was why the temple entry agitation of the Ezhavas led by Madhavan could harness the support of a small minority of caste Hindus. But the gradual advance of the temple entry agitation and the atmosphere it created slipped away from the control of the leadership. The attempts of the Ezhavas to articulate their rights more clearly provoked increased conflicts. The impact of subsequent developments like temple boycott and ensuing turmoil and conversions exerted not so insignificant influences on Madhavan.

Most of the modern Indian historical writings tend to present the sathyagrahas for freedom of movement as the struggle for temple entry. The Vaikom sathyagraha has been projected as the struggle for temple entry taken up by the leadership of the national movement. Most of the historians of the sathyagraha fall prey to this mistaken understanding. Even among the new generation social scientists there are some who are not able to distinguish the struggles for temple entry from that for freedom of movement. The national movement thus gained a double benefit: on the one hand, in the name of an aborted struggle it could imagine various castes in Hinduism as a single entity, and on the other, it could spread a false impression that a major breakthrough in defending the rights of the oppressed castes in Travancore was brought about by the national movement. Thus the struggle for freedom of movement gave them a golden opportunity to intervene in the social milieu of Travancore. Madhavan remained as a surrogate to these events effected through the mediation of Hinduism.

Madhavan's negotiation with nationalism progressed, though with many compromises. These negotiations were gradually nationalizing the Ezhavas. Because of this volte-face, he had to take the edge off the surge of the agitation. From 1921 to 1923 he concentrated all his efforts on anti- liquor movement. This facilitated a great deal in ensuring his share in Hinduism and the national movement.

Madhavan enrolled himself in the Congress party after his return from its all India conference at Cocinada, and took active part in the activities of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. From 1924 to 1927 he initiated satyagrahas in various places in Travancore for freedom of movement. When the demand for temple entry came to the fore, he strongly criticized those who argued that freedom of movement should have the top priority. His justification was that at the root of every kind of bondage, including the ban on free movement was untouchability, and the citadel of this evil was the temples. Winning the right to enter the temples would invariably break all other fetters, he argued. On this issue he had bitter arguments with Kumaran Asan, the founder General Secretary of SNDP Yogam. However, his scaling down to the same demand (freedom of movement) was the result of his association with nationalism.

T.K. Madhavan was invariably led to the struggle for freedom of movement by the immense influence of Hinduism and its values exerted on him, and the activities of his community which he feared would endanger the future of the religion. The national movement, in turn, could get a greater leverage in Travancore through him. His shift to the struggle for freedom of movement was in fact, the manifestation of his nagging inner conflict. This agitation too led to new crises and divergent discourses. Though he scaled down to the demand for freedom of movement, his experience from Vaikom was not encouraging. The lessons from Vaikom made some independent initiatives possible in certain places. The Ezhavas could achieve positive gains in some

places where the national leadership had no rigid control and deviated from the usual rituals of agitations. But these deviations were not recognized by the leadership of the community as its general line of action. There too the concerns of the national leadership had been actively embedded.

Madhavan was a great organizer who exhibited rare ability and leadership quality, with truly phenomenal achievements. What he could achieve as the Organizing Secretary of SNDP Yogam for two years surpassed the gains of SNDP Yogam in twenty five years. He wrested this historic gain overcoming very unfavourable circumstances. Perhaps in these two years (1927- 29) he was sacrificing his own life to build the SNDP Yogam. He did not lose heart even in the face of serious illness. His untiring work for the organization shattered his health, and led to his untimely demise in April 1930 at the age of forty five.

By the time he became the Organizing Secretary he had already declared his commitment to nationalism and Hinduism. He had a mature understanding on the interconnection between nationalism and religion also. As P.K. Balakrishnan observed, 'the period from 1924 to 1930 saw Madhavan's expanded image' He widened the mass base of the SNDP Yogam by fusing together the symbols of national culture and the organization. The annual conferences he convened during this period were exemplary events of this fusion. This helped to reorient the Ezhava identity and enabled external forces to make inroads into the community.

T.K. Madhavan's public life reflects the complexities the movement underwent which critically influenced the modernization and democratization of Kerala society. He was instrumental in taking the organization through a distinctive path of caste identity and community formation, and thus achieving a re-orientation of the new social processes.

During the period of his public activities spanning barely a decade and a half, another individual of his stature was rare to be found. He was born in a prosperous Ezhava family which had imbibed Hindu values, and this anchorage played a significant role in his character formation. Yet from his childhood days he had to suffer the brunt of caste oppression in school as well as in streets. After all, the prosperity and power of either the *Alummootil* or the *Komelezhath* families could not easily wish away the social structure of the time.

The print media played a prominent role in Travancore in arousing caste consciousness and in the process of community formation. The *Desabhimani* which started publishing from April 1915 with Madhavan as its editor could contribute a lot in this direction. In tune with his public activities, he tried to reorient the Ezhava consciousness through the pages of *Desabhimani*. It could reflect the rights of the Ezhavas and work effectively to put pressure on the government to seek redressal of their grievances. Actively intervening in the civic right movement, temple entry agitation and the struggle for freedom of movement, it became a true representative of the time. It is one of Madhavan's glorious achievements.

The *Desabhimani* was unique in its unparalleled democratic sense. It accommodated different views and divergent voices to a great extent. That it persisted in this policy even at times of extremely unfavourable situations is rare in the annals of the print media in Travancore. It readily recognized divergent opinions, and therefore was in creative debates on contemporary social issues. They are the landmarks of renaissance and concrete symbols of intellectual upsurge of the people.

Though there was a counter-current to Madhavan's views in the Ezhava leadership, he could extent his influence in the organization from the very beginning. He also got the support of Narayana Guru who had been the rallying point of all hues of the Ezhavas. Moreover, the *Alummootil* family's close links

with SNDP Yogam since its inception also helped him. The family had played a vital role in the formation and all activities of the SNDP Yogam in many ways, thus enjoying an exceptional place in Guru's mind. This too helped Madhavan to become a prominent leader of the Ezhavas.

His extreme commitment and devotion to the cause he believed in and the activities he undertook, and his fearlessness in striving to achieve his objectives had been recognized even by his detractors. The affliction of *asthma* which he contracted at childhood could not even weaken his will. In fact, he 'lived dangerously!'

The inner conflicts he underwent and the contradictory attitudes he adopted throughout his public life make it extremely complicated to read him. He represented the contradiction between the Hindu values he firmly upheld and the leadership he provided to the struggles of his community in its attempt to emancipate itself from the shackles of Hinduism. In fact, he was diverting the community's path of advancement which would otherwise have enabled it to attach itself to the foundational ethos of SNM. Therefore he represents a period of intense conflicts in the community formation of the Ezhavas and the history of Travancore. His activities played a prominent role in this complexity and flux. The concepts of nation and nationalism constitute a moment of transcendence through imagination, at the same time retaining all the traumas which communities continued to suffer. What T.K. Madhavan did was to integrate his community to nation and nationalism.

APPENDIX – I**Travancore Civic Right League****Grand Public Meeting****1024 Meenam 23 Saturday (5 April 1919)****Notice**

Arrangements are being made to convene a grand public meeting in Kottayam in the afternoon of 23rd Meenam ie 5th April, Saturday on behalf of the entire people of Travancore belonging to various faiths in order to elect and authorize a deputation to directly represent to the Honourable Deevanji and if necessary even higher authorities by the 26 lakhs of Travancore subjects suffering inequality in regard to civic rights to demand that all the subjects of His Highness the Maharaja be given the right to be employed in all departments and government jobs at all levels irrespective of caste and creed and to enjoy the benefits of public institutions equally by all communities, to eradicate the customary pollutions, customs like untouchability and unapproachability from all levels of government activities which pose a hurdle to the advancement of humble communities in the country and to get full rights to all subjects of His Highness irrespective of caste and creed.

Mr. E John BA BL, High Court Advocate will preside over the meeting.

Further details about the other speakers will be published later. We earnestly request through this public notice, as it is not possible to send invitations individually, all esteemed persons who had been authorized by the recently convened meetings of the Civic Right League and all other good hearted people who support the cause to participate in this meeting.

Sd/-
John Chandy
President, Civic Rights League

Desabhimani, 29 March 1919.

APPENDIX - II

Reply of T.K. Madhavan on receiving a Panegyric at the special meeting of North Travancore Sahodara Sanghom.

Venue	:	Cherthala
Date	:	24.03.1926 - (1101 Meenam 11 M.E)
Presided by	:	Mr. Murivelil Pachupillai
Panegyric read by	:	Mr. K.C. Kuttan
Panegyric presented by	:	Mr. N.R. Krishnan
Felicitation by	:	Swami Satyavrathan

Reply: Thank you very much for presenting me with a panegyric. Your panegyric is far different from all others. However much I respect your ideals, I do not agree in the least with certain portions of your eulogy. I feel that it is necessary to respond when you are trying to completely demolish my beliefs and views. On political matters I am an Indian Swarajist, and on religious matters I am a Hindu. I do not believe it right to say that the Hindu religion can be held responsible for the present caste system. I admit that Hinduism has been corrupted in course of time. Any religion might undergo such a fate in course of time. I absolutely deny your statement that the Hindus belonging to the low castes should not become followers of the Congress Party. I have no dispute about it if it has been said as a matter of policy. But if it has been said without sincere belief and policy I can just say that God Help Us. To those who belong to the *Sahodara Sanaghom* (Brotherhood) I would like to say that at one time I too used to hold your views. I have been studying the ideals of the Congressmen for the last 25 years. At the time I had objected to their ideals. Later I came to have intimate knowledge about them. Now I really believe in and support them.

The resolution on temple entry, which was allowed to be presented in the People's Assembly when Dewan Bahadur Krishnan Nair was the Dewan, was denied permission when Raghavayya become the Dewan. A complaint has been filed in this matter with the Dewan Raghavayya. Later a confidential talk with the Dewan resulted

in closing all avenues of redress. Temple entry is essential to us on account of religion, finance, and politics. I told him that there is only one thing to do. Mr. Raghvayya asked me what it was. I told him, "To see His Majesty and present our grievances". I requested him to do the needful to arrange a meeting with His Majesty. He replied that if meeting his Majesty was his own affair, then I need not participate in it. I precisely knew that Mr. Raghavayya had arranged such a meeting for a Christian brother. So I asked him if he could arrange a meeting for a Christian, why he could not do it for me and where we were to go for solving our problems. What he said was that I had to leave Thiruvithamkur for it. I asked him whether he had replied giving it serious thought. Then he kept mum. Then I took leave of him.

Because of my faith in Hinduism, I did not dare to abandon the demand for temple entry. I began to think of what to do for achieving our objective. I thought that it would be better to contact the Congressmen. I discussed the matter with my friends like Messrs. K.P. Kesava Menon and K.M. Panikkar, M.A with their cooperation, I attended the Cocinada Congress. When I talked to the Congress leaders like Moulana Muhammed Ali, C.R. Das, and Pundit Nehru about the removal of untouchability they asked me what they could do without the cooperation of those suffering untouchability. Following this I joined the Congress Party. At the Cocinada Conference itself I took measures to include the programme for the removal of untouchability an important item in their agenda. My colleagues like K.P. Kesava Menon were ready to begin a movement for temple entry. I discussed this with learned men like Messrs. C. Krishnan B.A.B.L (Editor, Mithavadi), N. Kumaran B.A.B.L. and C.V. Kunjuraman (Editor, Kerala Kaumudi). They expressed the view that for the time being we need work only for the freedom to use public roads. It is absurd to say that the Congressmen staged the Vaikom Satyagraha just because they felt that they would not be able to win self rule with the spinning wheel campaign. I think that it is not proper to cast aspersions on the intentions of great men like Mahatma Gandhi. It is also absurd to say that if they get self-rule they would suppress us. If it is admitted for argument's sake that the downtrodden will never tolerate it, their economic conditions also make it necessary to join the Congress Party.

It is also not true as mentioned by the president of the meeting that I am not interested in the resolution on eradication of alcohol. It has been temporarily stopped

because of the government's new policy statement. With the new policy statement the government intends to completely stop the sale of arrack in 40 years. What we should try is to bring down the 40-year period I would like to ask the President what he has done for it. In the beginning of the anti-arrack movement we had to suffer much from other communities. Many persons have said that T.K. Madhavan is coming out with this stratagem to equalize the Ezhavas with the Nairs and the Namboodiris. Some others have said that they should not support me even if it means consuming the whole toddy that the Ezhavas tap. Some friends have even told me in person. I have decided to campaign for one year for the fight to temple entry. The conservatives are trying to preserve untouchability owing to their belief. It is to destroy their belief that I am conducting the propaganda work. In between there has to be certain Trust cases. Now a day false belief is replacing genuine belief. So I have decided to enter temples practicing individual civil disobedience. That is to say, enter the temples by personally disobeying the law.

Desabhimani, 21 Meenam 1101 M.E (3 April 1926)

APPENDIX – III A

Mahatma Gandhi's Auto script on Temple Entry Question

Interviewed by Mr. T.K. Madhavan, Editor Desabhimani, Quilon

As to the right of entry in to public temples for Elavas and others, Mr. Gandhi said that they had a perfect right to enter them and offer worship precisely on the same footing as other non – Brahmin Hindus. He dissented from the view that they should be prevented from entering the temples on religious grounds. He was told that these communities had fee admission in to schools. There upon Mr. Gandhi said that, If the communities in questions could act with perfect self restraint, they could enter the temples and court imprisonment if law interfered. They should not enter in masses but only singly. The virtue lay in quiet suffering. Mr. Gandhi's to untouchability does not extend to restraint up on, inter-dining and inter-marriage. He defends them stoutly on spiritual and hygienic grounds. Asked whether the local Congress Committee should help the matter of the rights of Elavas and others Mr. Gandhi emphatically said that it was their duties to do so.

Desabhimani 1 October 1921

APPENDIX – III B

Mahatma Gandhi's Auto script on Temple Entry Question

Interviewed by Mr. T.K. Madhavan, Editor Desabhimani, Quilon

As to the right of entry into public temples for Ezhavas and others, Mr. Gandhi said that they had a perfect right to enter them and offer worship precisely on the same footing as other Non-Brahmin Hindus. He dissented from the view that they should be prevented from entering the temples on religious ground. He was told that these communities had free admission into schools. Thereupon Mr. Gandhi said that, if the communities in question would act with perfect self restraint, they could enter the temples and court imprisonment if law interfered. They should not enter in masses, but only singly. The virtue lay in quite suffering. Asked whether the local Congress Committee should help in the matter of the rights of Ezhavas and others, Mr. Gandhi emphatically said that it was their duty to do so.

P.K. Madhavan, Vol. I, p.169.

APPENDIX – IV

Gandhiji's Hand written message

The Reformers in Travancore have done well in the matter of untouchability. The more I think of it in terms of religion the more convinced I become that it is the greatest blot upon Hinduism. I therefore hope that the reformers will not rest comfort till every temple and every public school is open to the so called untouchables on a footing of equality with the other Hindus

Sabarmati - M.K. Gandhi

21.01.1926

P.K. Madhavan, Vol. I, p. 361.

APPENDIX – V

Gandhiji's Hand written message

Travancore Government is entitled to congratulation on the step they have taken regarding the use by the so called untouchables on the public roads round temples. But it is by no means the maximum it could do. So I hope the government and the popular assembly will have the courage to go to the logical extent and insist on throwing open to the untouchables all public institutions including temples on the same line as like rest of the population

Sabarmati - M.K. Gandhi

21.01.1926

NB: Here the two words 'including temples' is added in between the lines

See the photo copy of the original message given as appendix V-(a)

P.K. Madhavan, 1986. *T. K. Madhavante Jeevacharithram*, Kottayam, D.C.

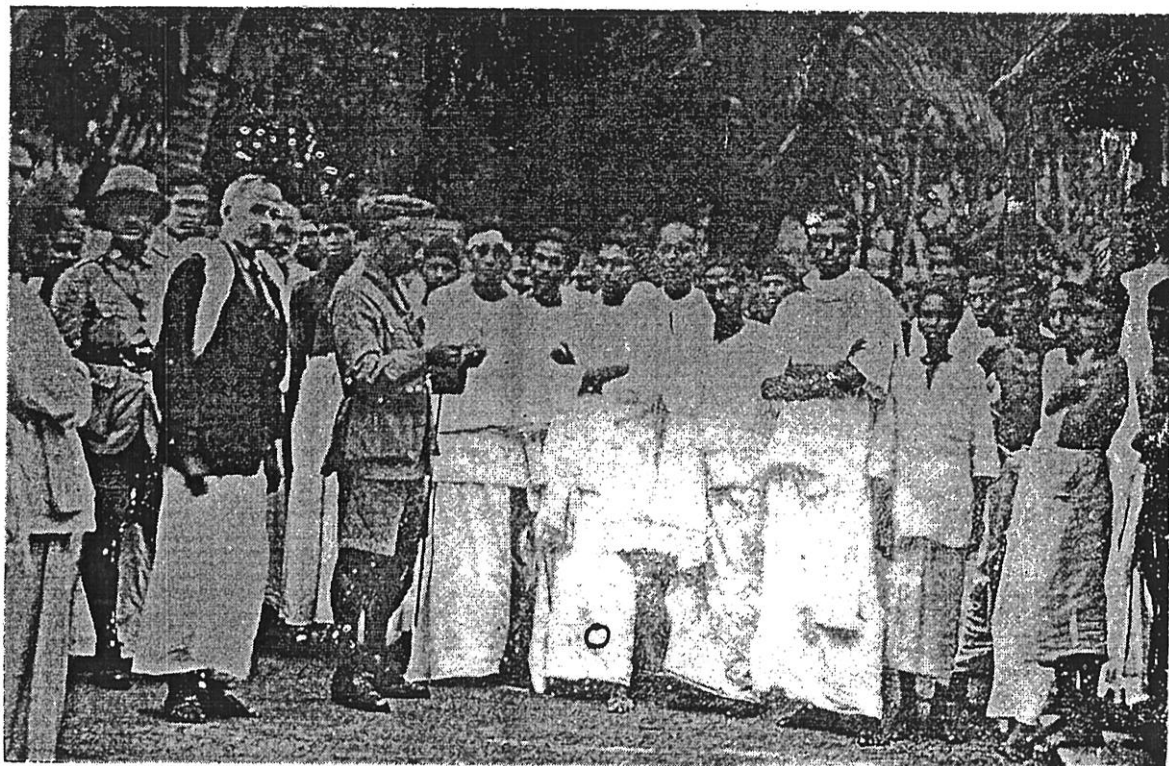
Books, p.20.

APPENDIX- V A

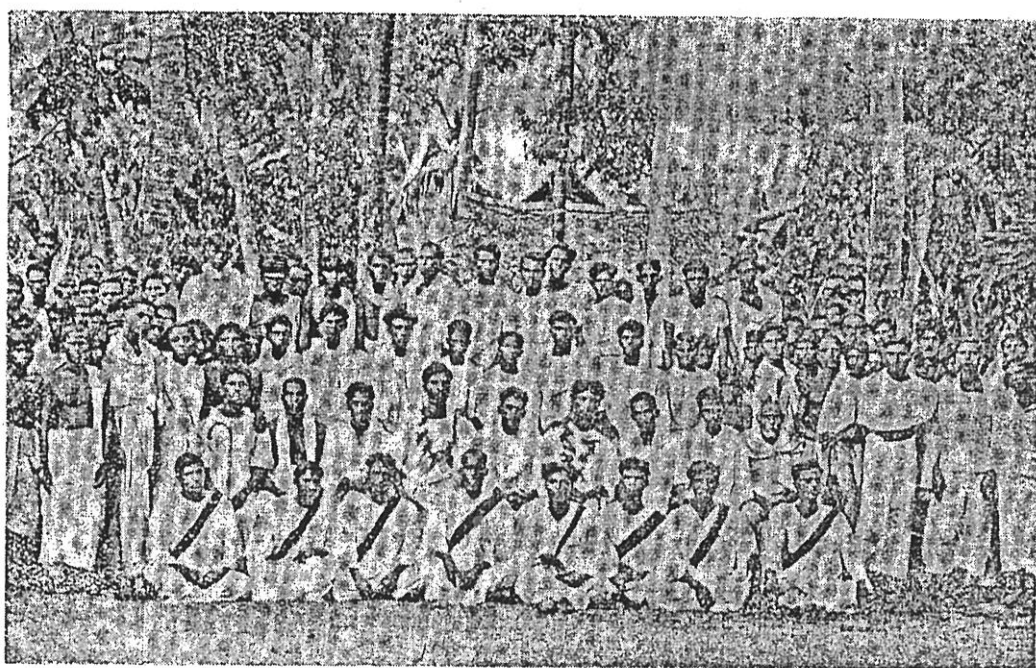
That we are Government
 is entitled to our gratitude
 on the steps they have taken
 regarding the use of
 the so-called untouchable
 of the Indian roads round
 temples. But it is to say so
 means the road is now
 it could do. I do hope the
 Government and the
 people hope to take all
 have the courage to go
 in the tropical climate
 and insist on throwing
 open to the untouchables
 all public institutions
 including temples
 on the same basis as the
 rest of the population.
 Government are justified
 in this.

APPENDIX- VI

Photographs taken after the Thiruvarpur Riot



o *T.K. Madhavan*



T.K. Madhavan (Sitting in the second row, flanked by the garlanded volunteers)

APPENDIX- VII

T.K. Madhavan,
Organizing Secretary,
SNDP Yogam,
Kollam.

Camp. Changanassery
20 Kanni 1103 M.E
(6 October 1927)

Respected Friend,

Thank you for your letter sent through Mr. S. Padhnanabhan. Our organizational work is going well. We have decided to complete the work by 30th of this month. It will certainly be completed within the time. From here, some people from Chertala want me to go there. There the present issue is that of conversion. Your invitation is worthy too. At present we are very anxious over the visit of Mahatma Gandhi and the Thiruvarpur uproar.

He will come on 26th and leave latter. We shall decide where to go after that. It is better for a person from that Taluk to stand for election. And Organizational work will be more helpful than anything else. It will definitely be accomplished if we get the help of the Nairs. It is not possible for me, at my present state of health, to stand as a candidate. It would be better if Mr. Narayanan contest the election.

You might have heard about the uproar in Thiruvarpur. Mr. Kuttan Nair had met Mahatma Gandhi at Tamilnadu just three days back. His advice was not for Satyagraha but to enter the prohibited area in accordance with the Civil Disobedience policy. And it has been duly been intimated to the government. The policy is to march forward defying the police line if they try to halt us, or to get through a breach in the line. We can jump over the walls too. We are considering if we would do the same after Mahatma Gandhi has gone back. Anyhow we have got intimation that there would be 1500 persons within the prohibited area. Nobody has stopped them. The Assistant Police Superintendent and others had come and met me and gone back after enquiry. If Mahatma Gandhi visits he will come to Thiruvarpur, so I am going there just now along

with my family. We have decided to donate him a fund (money bag) on behalf of the community. Hope that the man sent there to collect the money have already returned. When Kochukalekkal *Dharmabhatan* (Volunteer) went there for collection he was told that I had shown some partiality towards the people of Areekkara and so they would not donate any thing at all. Thus writes the *Dharmabhatan*. Nevertheless they gave him a sum of Rs. 2. I don't least remember what kind of partiality I showed. Both of you are bosom friends. Therefore I request you to please enquire about it and sent me a line. I entrust you with the job lest they should not answer me. So also *Dharmabhatan* writes that the merchant Veluthakunju Muthalali of Chengannoor has informed him that he would not pay because of some misunderstanding with me and would disclose the reason if I would go over there and ask him. I would be much obliged if you would enquire about the matter and inform me.

I feel much better now. Doctor's advice is to take rest. In between community work I take some rest. My wife is also with me. Hope you are fine.

Yours truly,
T.K. Madhavan
Sd/-

To
Humour Poet,
Mulloor S. Padhmanabha Panickar.

Researcher's Private Collection

APPENDIX – VIII

T.K. Madhavan,
Organizing Secretary,
SNDP Yogam, Kollam.

Camp. Changanassery
18 Kanni 1103
(4 October 1927)

Received today the telegram sent by Kuttan Nair who has been sent to meet Mahatma Gandhi. It states that Mahatma Gandhi would try to come to Thiruvarpur to receive the fund collected and he has granted permission to violate government orders and enter prohibited roads in Thiruvarpur. Mahatmaji has also advised that what needed there is not the policy of Sathyagraha. Please convey this to all. Mahatmaji is coming to Thiruvarpur on 26th of this month.

N.B 26th of this month means 26th Kanni 1103 Malayalam Era

Researcher's Private Collection

APPENDIX – IX

NOTICE

Grand Public Meeting at Thiruvarpu

Rajasree T.K. Madhavan Presides

Gentlemen,

A public meeting is being held today at 3 pm at the ground on the western side of Thiruvarpu temple to be presided over by *Rajasree* T.K.Madhavan. On the occasion a statement on the struggle for freedom of movement in Thiruvarpu published by T.K. Madhavan and C. Kuttan Nair will be read out publicly, followed by speeches by Swami Atmaraman, K.R. Narayanan, and P.K. Kochukunju etc. on topics like freedom of movement, temple entry and *Khadar*.

The presence of great men are solicited

K.S. Velayudhan
Anti-untouchability squad Member

Thiruvarpu,
23 Kann 1103 (9 October 1927)

Confidential Section File No: 846/1927
Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

DIARY OF T.K. MADHAVAN
26 October 1916 and 27 October 1916

— 72 —

1916
October 26.
മരണം. തൃശ്ശൂർ. വൃശ്ചം.

അമാവാസി കിരീടം, ചിത്തിരക്കുട്ടത്തിനാൾ

went to Mr. R. Kumaram
+ took midday meal from
there. went to Rama Varma
club + took bit-bits from there.
Returned home in the evening.
Ragunath to Mr. Koush
Radhakanthan went
to Ponnalloor in the evening.
S.T. Reddy died at 3. in
the evening.

— 73 —

1916.
October 27.
മരണം. ചെന്നി. വൃശ്ചം.

Slept during day. Did not
feel quite well. went
to Press in the afternoon.
wrote my 203rd Column
+ stayed here on that day.
M. Narayanan went
home. wrote "Slaves +
Transcend Government
Service" went to Press
in the evening. Returned
home at the night in
Rikha. Sent kitten away.

DIARY OF T.K. MADHAVAN

1 December 1916 and 04 December 1916

— 108 —

1916.
December 1.

went to hospital
 & took medicine
 from Dr. Thompson.
 In the evening Mr. C.
 came here & stayed in
 law & C.B. went to
 the Editor's & left
 there. attended
 the farewell party to
 Mr. Hoag Gully at
 Dr. Lakshmanan's
 Bangalore.

— 111 —

1916.
December 4.

In the morning went to Mr.
 Kula Kanta Panikar's & got
 Sherlock Holmes & Indian
 detective stories from him.
 wrote the account of Sadavou
 & D.S. for dispatch went to
 hospital in the afternoon, met
 C.B. & Mousie & C. went to
 Lakshmanan's Bungalow & saw
 the arrangement there & then
 welcomed a Swami of the
 Ramakrishna Mission. Read
 the first story of Indian Detective
 stories & the first story advertised
 of the Sherlock Holmes. Got the
 letter of Lakshmanan chairman
 of the Bangalore.

DIARY OF T.K. MADHAVAN

05 December 1916 and 06 December 1916

- 112 -

മറുപടി

1916.

പ്രവേശനം ൨.൦.

ചൊവ്വ.

December 5.

in the morning went to hospital. did not get medicine. Reached home. Read the end story of Sherlock Holmes' adventure. Went in the evening to Dr. Sekhmenis to see Swami's letter. Ramesh Krishna a Hindu returned in the night - about 8 with C.V. Velazathan. Came & took luggage from here. C.V. Velazathan & brother in law went to Vilayathan in the night & there they slept. Took oil bath.

- 113 -

മറുപടി

1916.

പ്രവേശനം ൨.൦.

ബുധൻ.

December 6

went in the morning to Dr. Sekhmenis & there had a talk with Swami. Several friends in which several people took part. Swami who discussed in the afternoon also went there & there attended the Convention Class. Returned to office with Vilayathan. There had a talk with Vilayathan on the Friday afternoon at Malabar the under took the consultation.

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578/1922.

(2) Cover File Nos.

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1439/1884 (Bundle No.101, Serial No.2282),
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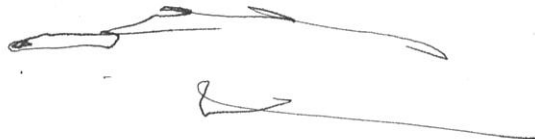
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L. INTERVIEW

- (1) Babu Vijayanath, Son of T.K Madhavan on various dates (2004-06).
- (2) G. Priyadarsanan, author, writer and former leader of S.N.D.P
Yogam on various dates (2004-06).

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GLOSSARY

<i>Avarnas</i>	-	Non- caste Hindus
<i>Devasowm</i>	-	Religious endowments and property belonging to temples
<i>Dewan</i>	-	Chief of the bureaucracy (Chief Secretary)
<i>Dharma Rajya</i>	-	The State which upheld the sacred laws of Hinduism
<i>Dharma</i>	-	The sacred law (Bounden duty)
<i>Dharma-bhadanmar</i>	-	Volunteer corps
<i>Eekri</i>	-	An Ezhava converted to Christianity
<i>Ezhavalit</i>	-	Identity as an Ezhava
<i>Gopuram</i>	-	Gate tower/ Main gate of a temple
<i>Jatha</i>	-	Procession
<i>Karayogam</i>	-	Village level of an organization
<i>Langar</i>	-	Community kitchen
<i>Mantra</i>	-	Sacred counsel
<i>Matom</i>	-	Monastry
<i>Nazhika</i>	-	A Time span of 24 minutes
<i>Padasala</i>	-	School
<i>Peischar</i>	-	Chief revenue officer of a District
<i>Provertikar</i>	-	Village officer
<i>Sahodara Sanghom</i>	-	Brotherhood organization
<i>Sanatana Hindu</i>	-	Eternal Hindu
<i>Sanchara Swatantryam</i>	-	Freedom of movement
<i>Sastras – Puranas</i>	-	Sacred texts of Hindusim
<i>Sheristadar</i>	-	Office Superintendent or a chief in a govt. office
<i>Taluk</i>	-	Administrative sub- division of a District
<i>Tamasha</i>	-	Entertainment / Joke
<i>Thasildar</i>	-	Administrative head of a Taluk